

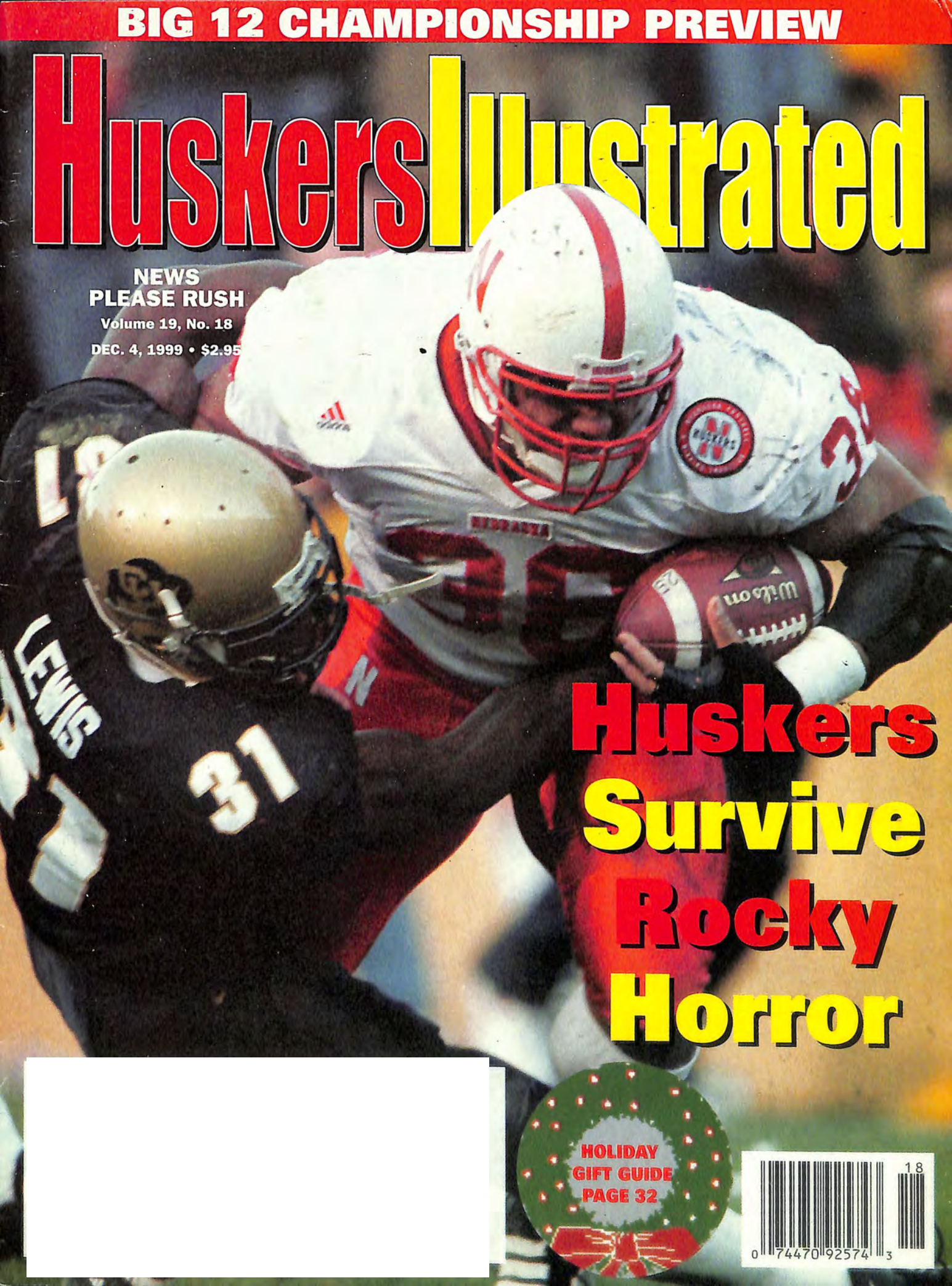
BIG 12 CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

Huskers Illustrated

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Volume 19, No. 18

DEC. 4, 1999 • \$2.95

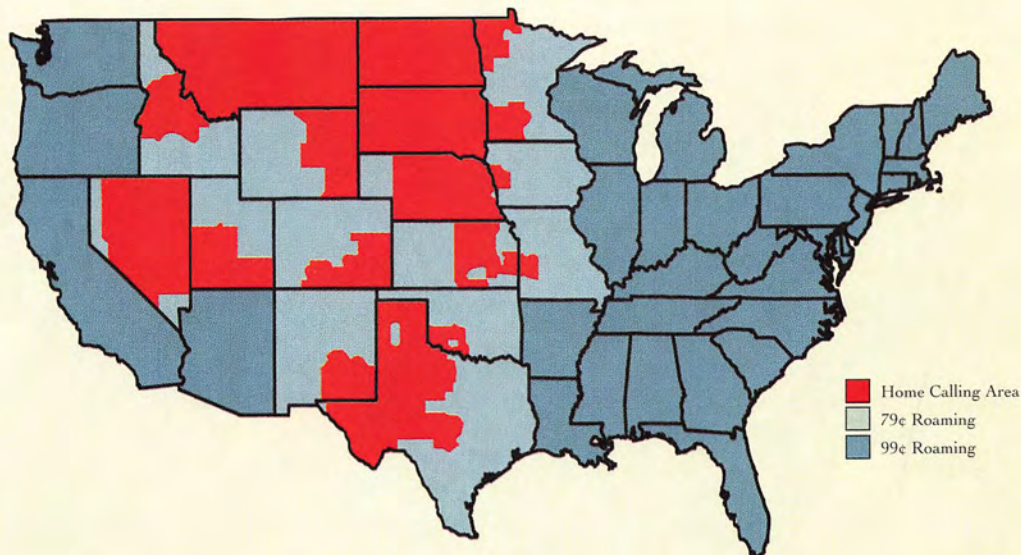


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Injured tackle Jason Schwab hopes for a second chance at his final season. *By Mike Babcock*

ON THE COVER

Dan Alexander runs over a Colorado tackler, setting up the winning touchdown. *Photo by Scott Bruhn*

Two-Dimensional Offense

I am writing in response to Bob Schaller's recent column entitled "The Philosophy Has Changed," in which he asserts that Nebraska's increased use of the pass has hindered the Huskers' ability to pull away from opposing football teams, resulting in several close calls during Frank Solich's tenure as coach.

While I share Mr. Schaller's view that the run is an important part of Nebraska's offense, I firmly believe that he has fingered the wrong culprit for some of Nebraska's offensive woes. In fact, some of the examples that Mr. Schaller mentions in his column actually support the argument that the pass should be used more often.

Offensive turnovers, not a "change in philosophy," resulted in a close call last season against Missouri. Turnovers have been a continuing problem this season, including the game against Southern Mississippi. Mr. Schaller uses both of these games as examples in his column. And, Nebraska most likely would have defeated Texas, had the Huskers not lost three fumbles.

The running game is, and should remain, an integral part of Nebraska's offense. However, I do not believe I am exaggerating when I say that Matt Davison and Tracey Wistrom are two of the most talented receivers in college football today. And don't forget Bobby Newcombe. To use those players sparingly because Nebraska is a "running team" would be poor strategy. I believe Mr. Schaller would agree that Nebraska was able to "pull away" from California fairly well, despite a limited running attack. Having a two-dimensional offense is a plus, not a negative.

After a tough loss such as the one against Texas, it is human nature to point fingers and blame the coach, when, in that particular game, it was execution and not strategy that failed us. I can see a marked improvement in Nebraska's offense and defense this season. Let's support Frank Solich and recognize the improvements he has helped bring about.

John C. Garcia
Phoenix, Ariz.

Thanks For The Memories

I would like to thank Mike Babcock and Huskers Illustrated for bringing back a cherished memory with your article "Huskers Romp in New Stadium" in the Sept. 18 issue which chronicled the

Husker teams of the 1920s.

One of the last memories of my grandfather was sitting around the breakfast table talking Husker football with three generations of Huskers. My grandfather, who was battling the ravages of old age unexpectedly contributed to our conversation his memory of watching the Four Horsemen of Notre Dame play in Lincoln, noting, "what incredible athletes they were, although the Huskers won."

My grandfather, who earned a degree in electrical engineering at NU, passed soon after. As I read the article describing the overflowing crowd of 15,000 plus attending the 1922 contest, I couldn't help but see my grandfather as a young man sitting on one of those huge piles of coal outside of the stadium.

Mark A. Peterson
Florence, Ala.

Not True Texas Fans

We were excited to be able to see our Huskers play in our adopted hometown, Austin, Texas, on Oct. 23. We gladly offered tips for dining and shopping in Austin to out-of-town Husker fans before the game and told everyone that Austin was a friendly and hospitable town.

Much to our dismay, we spent the entire game viewing obscene gestures and hearing vulgar, nasty yelling directed at a steady stream to our Nebraska section and players. We want to tell all the Husker fans who made the trip to Austin that we are sorry they had to witness these childish acts from Texas "fans". This is not the norm. True Texas fans respect and admire Nebraska for the great sports teams we produce and the gracious fans we have. Texas Coach Mack Brown has been quoted by the local media asking for all Texas fans to treat visiting teams and their fans with respect and the dignity that the Nebraska fans displayed in 1998 when Texas visited Lincoln.

Be proud of our reputation, on and off the field. We have a class act!

Bonny Gray (NU Class of 1981)
Doug Gray (NU Class of 1980)
Austin, Texas



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Equally Impressive?

**NU coaches say
Ralph, Mike Brown
both deserve honors**

When Ralph Brown is named first-team All-Big 12, which he almost certainly will be, he will become the first Nebraska defensive back ever to be so honored in three consecutive seasons.

The Cornhuskers have had two-time, first-team, all-conference defensive backs since the NCAA liberalized substitution rules to allow for two-platoon play — but never three-time.

Such recognition is well-deserved. Brown has been a starting cornerback since the first game of the 1996 season, against Michigan State. He was the first true freshman position player to start an opening game at Nebraska since World War II. And he has started 49 more games since then.

His accomplishments also could earn him first-team All-America recognition, something that hasn't happened to a Cornhusker defensive back since 1984, when safety Bret Clark was a first-team selection by the Football Writers, The Sporting News and the Football News.

Clark was just the fourth Nebraska defensive back in the modern era to earn All-America honors. The others were Dave Butterfield (1976), Wonder Monds (1975) and Larry Wachholtz (1966).

Brown would be in select company, IF he were to be named to an All-America team.

While Ralph has attracted attention for his play, teammate Mike Brown, the starting rover since the first



Ralph Brown, returning a fumble against Kansas State, has been a starting cornerback since the first game of the 1996 season.

game of 1997, has labored in relative anonymity until this season.

But for those who have watched him, it's no stretch to suggest that he also deserves first-team All-America consideration, as well as first-team all-conference honors.

Nebraska has never had a better tandem in the secondary at the same time.

"Those guys have been tremendous throughout their time in our program, not only as great football players but really as young men," Coach Frank Solich said. "They're both very, very mature."

"They're both excellent students. They both do the right things."

Going into the Colorado game, Ralph Brown had broken up 45 passes during his career, more than twice as many as Clark (21), who ranks second on the Cornhuskers' all-time list.

Ralph also had 10 career pass interceptions, just four short of the school record.

"He's been out there on an island by himself, with the great receivers that we've faced throughout the

years and has done just a tremendous job on that end of it," said Solich.

Mike Brown's statistics are similarly impressive. With 74 tackles going into the Colorado game, it appeared he would lead the team for a third consecutive season, something that has happened only twice before since official tackle statistics were first kept in the 1965 season.

Jerry Murtaugh, the Cornhusker career leader in tackles, led the team in 1968, 1969 and 1970. And Marc Munford was Nebraska's leading tackler in 1984, 1985 and 1986.

Murtaugh and Munford were linebackers.

Strong safety Reggie Cooper led the secondary in tackles in 1988, 1989 and 1990. But Mike Brown would be the first defensive back to lead the team three times in a row.

In fact, the only defensive back ever to lead the Cornhuskers in tackles prior to Mike Brown was Steve Carmer, a free safety who was credited with 87 tackles in 1991.

Mike Brown has been

"probably the best tackler we've had in the secondary that I can remember ever being around," said defensive coordinator Charlie McBride.

"I mean, he's a great open-field tackler. He's a great run-support guy. When he's coming, he's coming. He doesn't fool around. He's going to come full-speed."

McBride, who's in his 23rd season at Nebraska, is effusive in his praise of Mike Brown, whom he calls "as good of a football player at the position as we've ever had here."

"As far as the overall package, Mike brings it," McBride said.

"Mike is just a tremendous player," said Solich. "I hope he's able to get the recognition and gain the honors a great football player gets because he has been tremendous throughout his time here."

The problem is, with Ralph Brown also in the secondary, Mike Brown might be overlooked by those who haven't watched him play week-in and week-out this season. ■

HUSKERS NOMINATED

Fifteen Cornhuskers were nominated for GTE/CoSIDA Academic All-America honors.

Sean Applegate, Sr., WB, 3.394, industrial technology

Mike Brown, Sr., R, 3.242, business administration

Jamie Burrow, So., MLB, 3.398, biological science

Matt Davison, Jr., SE, 3.520, Communication studies

T.J. DeBates, Sr., TE, 3.709, fisheries & wildlife

Jeff Hemje, So., CB, 3.948, electrical engineering

Adam Julch, Sr., OT, 3.238, mathematics, economics

Ben Kingston, Sr., FB, 3.645, political science, philosophy

Greg McGraw, Sr., FS, 3.491, social science

Willie Miller, Jr., FB, 3.466, communication studies

Eric Ryan, Sr., RE, 3.666, animal science

Brian Shaw, Sr., SLB, 4.0, animal science, agricultural economics

James Sherman, Sr., OG, 3.239, criminal justice

Kyle Vanden Bosch, Jr. RE, 3.775, business administration

Dave Volk, So., OT, 3.344, psychology

Brown and Shaw were three-time nominees. Shaw was a second-team Academic All-American last season. Nebraska has had at least one first-team, football Academic All-American in each of the last 13 seasons and leads the nation in all-time football All-Americans, with 55.

Notre Dame is second on the list, with 38.

HOMEGROWN HUSKERS

Despite a population of only about 1.6 million, the state has always provided a solid base for Nebraska's football program, and this season was no different.

Thirteen Nebraskans started at least one game for the Cornhuskers this season: Sean Applegate (Lincoln), Eric Crouch (Omaha), Matt Davison (Tecumseh), Russ Hochstein (Hartington), Adam Julch (Omaha), Loran Kaiser (Farwell), Chris Kelsay (Auburn), Willie Miller (Omaha), Brian Shaw (Deweese), Wilson Thomas (Omaha), Tyrone Uhler (Battle Creek), Dave Volk (Battle Creek) and Aaron Wills (Omaha).

Three of those 13 came to Nebraska as walkons: Applegate, Shaw and Uhler.

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

MARKED IMPROVEMENT

Redshirted freshman Dahrran Diedrick has made significant strides at I-back this season and has "really gathered the confidence of this coaching staff," Coach Frank Solich said.

Diedrick's biggest problem has been "probably getting as many opportunities (to play) as what he would like to," said Solich. "But on the other side of it, there were things Dahrran needed to get done to make him a better back, and I think he's worked at that.

"When Dahrran first got here, he was pretty much a straight-up-and-down type of back. I think his running style has improved. I think his hands have improved."

Junior Dan Alexander, who has played fullback as well as I-back, had a similar problem handling the ball early in his career, according to Solich. "At one point, when Dan got here, you'd hold your breath in terms of (his) catching an option pitch. But he did what he had to do in the off-season.

"I think Dahrran has improved along those lines also."

SURGERY FOR SLECHTA

Sophomore defensive tackle Jeremy Slechta was slated for reconstructive knee surgery after suffering a torn anterior cruciate ligament in practice during the off-week before the Colorado game. Slechta tried to plant his foot while pursuing a ball carrier who had cut back, causing the injury.

Slechta suffered a partial tear of the ligament in his left knee in early October but was able to return to action, with the help of a knee brace, after missing three games.

Because of the surgery, his availability for spring practice is uncertain.

Slechta was Loran Kaiser's backup and played in the regular rotation.

NINE IS ENOUGH

Sophomore weakside linebacker Mark Vedral grew up on a farm about 12 miles north of Gregory, S.D., a farming community with a population of approximately 1,500.

Gregory High School plays 11-man football, in the state's smallest 11-man classification.

"We're supposed to be nine-man, but we stay 11-man," said Vedral.

His freshman team played nine-man opponents, however.

"When they were on offense, we had to play nine-man defense, and when we were on offense, they had to play 11-man defense," he said. "That was just totally different.

"I didn't think two people could make that much difference, but they do. Having two guys less on the field, it's just wide-open. I wouldn't want to play nine-man. I like 11-man a lot better."

Two interior linemen are eliminated on offense in nine-man football.

BASKETBALL TEAM ADDS FLORIDA FORWARD

Eddie Baker, a 6-foot-6 forward from Jean Ribault High School in Jacksonville, Fla., signed a letter of intent with the Nebraska men's basketball team during the NCAA's early signing period in mid-November. Among the factors influencing his decision, Baker told the Lincoln Journal Star, was that he has liked the Cornhuskers "ever since (football quarterback) Tommie Frazier played for them."

Frazier came to Nebraska from Palmetto, Fla.

Baker's only official recruiting visit was to Nebraska in October. Among the other schools he had been considering were Florida, Florida State and Jacksonville.

AMONG THE ELITE (EIGHT)

The Nebraska women's soccer team advanced to the quarterfinals of the NCAA Tournament by defeating Texas A&M 1-0 at the Abbott Sports Complex in Lincoln.

Coach John Walker's Huskers were to play at home against Notre Dame, with the winner of that match advancing to the Final Four at San Jose, Calif., Dec. 3-5. The Nebraska-Notre Dame winner will play the winner of Santa Clara-Connecticut for the right to advance to the championship final.

LONDON'S PLAY 'UNUSUAL'

Senior wingback Frankie London won the Compaq "Most Unusual Play of the Week" award for his somersault into the end zone for a two-point conversion following the Cornhuskers' third touchdown in their 41-15 victory against Kansas State. London is the holder on extra-point kicks. ■

Surviving A Rocky Finish

*Huskers start out rumblin',
end up bumblin', stumblin', fumblin'*



Brian Hill

WAS IT a case of Nebraska turning ultra-conservative with a three-touchdown lead? Did Colorado play that much better in the second half? Was it that slippery football the officials continue to make Nebraska use this season? Was it the altitude?

Yes, yes, yes and maybe.

There were signs of the Twilight Zone before the regular-season finale in this outstanding but befuddling year.

First, the Big 12 North Division championship trophy arrived in Boulder during the week with Nebraska already inscribed on it. The Colorado contingent had to love that.

Ralphie, Colorado's live buffalo mascot, refused to complete her run while leading the Buffaloes onto the field. (According to the postgame notes, "it is believed that she is in heat.")

Although there was enough snow remaining for Nebraska's mascot, Little Red, to take a pelting, the temperature at kickoff was listed at 60 degrees. That's just not normal for Nov. 26 in Boulder, Colo.

Anyway, we should learned early on to expect the unex-

pected with all that has happened this season.

It should be noted that Nebraska did not fumble on its first play from scrimmage, as the Huskers had in the previous two games. Instead, Dan Alexander took a pitch and went 50 yards for a touchdown.

We reminded you last time that Nebraska had won the last three meetings with Colorado by a grand total of 10 points. It apparently isn't supposed to be easy.

The Huskers went on to fumble eight times, losing five, to push their nation-leading totals to 47 and 23.

The bottom line was a 33-30 victory and a 10-1 record, which should be considered an outstanding accomplishment in any season.

By the way, since you probably only saw the final statistics, here is the breakdown, by half, for the one that almost got away:

	First Half		Second Half	
	NU	CU	NU	CU
First downs	10	7	4	15
Rushing yards	288	57	68	109
Passing yards	24	60	20	278
Total yards	312	117	88	387
Fumbles-lost	3-1	1-0	5-4	5-2

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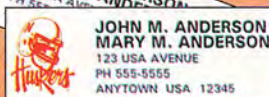
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Big 12 Going South

It's beginning to look as if every conference championship will eventually end up in Texas



**Mike
BABCOCK**

TIME HAS DIMINISHED the significance of the 1941 Rose Bowl game. That's understandable, given all that the Nebraska football program has achieved in the 60 years since then.

Nevertheless, it's still a notable game in Cornhusker history. Nebraska's first bowl game was No. 14 on the Omaha World-Herald's list of "Games of the Century," just ahead of the 1983 Kickoff Classic

against Penn State and just behind the 1923 upset of Notre Dame.

The 1941 Rose Bowl was a big deal, even though Nebraska lost. Trust me.

• If not for Texas, the Cornhuskers probably wouldn't have played in the game.

The Longhorns upset previously undefeated Texas A&M in the regular-season finale to secure the Rose Bowl bid for once-beaten Nebraska. If the Aggies had won, they probably would have been invited to play Pacific Coast Conference champion Stanford on New Year's Day.

Following the A&M game, Texas coach D.X. Bible described the 7-0 victory as especially satisfying because it had helped the Cornhuskers. The popular coach had gone to Texas from Nebraska.

Considering the Longhorns had lured him away, it was the least they could do.

I mention this piece of the dusty past because it represents one of the few times I can find when something was mutually beneficial to the Nebraska and Texas athletic programs.

The Longhorns beat their arch-rival. And Nebraska got to go to Pasadena, Calif.

Since then, what has been good for one has usually not been good for the other.

Consider the Big 12 Conference, which was formed when Texas and three other teams from the former Southwest Conference joined members of the Big Eight Conference.

"Joined" was the way it was initially presented, giving the impression that the Big Eight was simply increasing its membership, adding Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Baylor.

The impression was, the new conference would operate by the old rules. But that proved to be a monumental misconception. The Texas schools, and Texas in particular, took charge.

And the conference's orientation went south.

The league offices were immediately moved from Kansas City to Dallas, a move presented as having little significance but one that was certainly symbolic of what was to follow.

The Big 12 was created out of economic necessity. The

Southwest Conference was falling from prominence because of NCAA problems, and the Big Eight needed the national television exposure, and money, the Texas schools, particularly Texas and Texas A&M, would provide.

Everything is about money these days. That's why the conference office was moved to Dallas. That's why the conference sponsors a football playoff. And that's why it is beginning to look as if every conference championship event will eventually end up in Texas.

The Big 12 Board of Directors recently voted to move the men's and women's basketball tournaments from Kansas City to Dallas in 2003 and 2004. The tournaments will return to Kansas City in 2005. No decision has been made regarding where they will be played after that.

The men's tournament has been held at Kansas City's Kemper Arena since 1977. It has been played before enthusiastic, sellout crowds, and was considered a fixture in Kansas City when the Big 12 was formed. It will move to the yet-to-be-completed American Airlines Center in Dallas.

"I don't have a problem with Dallas," Nebraska Coach Danny Nee said at the conference basketball preview, in Dallas. "You could have it in Miami as long as people show up to watch."

Whether or not people will is the question.

Texas Coach Rick Barnes enthusiastically supported the move. Duh.

The Board of Directors also is considering moving the conference baseball tournament from Oklahoma City to the Ballpark in Arlington, another venue deep in the heart of Texas.

And the football playoff will alternate between Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City and Texas Stadium in Irving, Texas, after this season's game at the Alamodome in San Antonio.

At least the North Division representative will continue to have a "home" game for the football playoff every other year, although based on the game's short history, North Division teams would have been better off without a football playoff, regardless of where it was played.

Texas A&M dashed Kansas State's hopes of playing for the national championship last season by upsetting the Wildcats 36-33 in St. Louis, and, of course, Texas ruined Nebraska's chances of playing for the national title in 1996 by defeating the Cornhuskers 37-27, also in St. Louis.

With that, and taking an historical point of view, the debt to the Longhorns for the 1941 Rose Bowl bid should have been paid in full. But Nebraska's frustrations with Texas have continued. ■



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New 'Pipeline' Under Construction

*Senior Julch says it's just a matter of time
until underclassmen will be ready to take over*



**Bob
SCHALLER**

NOT SINCE the formative years of the "Pipeline" has there been this much young talent on the depth chart of Nebraska's offensive line.

There are only two seniors and one junior listed on the two-deep depth chart. With all but two players returning, starters Adam Julch and James Sherman, the young guns on the Husker line will get to show what they're made of even

more next year and the year after.

"We have some young players who have a chance to be really good players," said offensive line coach Milt Tenopir. "Several of these sophomores and freshmen have already developed a lot. We have a chance to have a really good line down the road."

Even the seniors sense something special waiting in the wings.

"It's really pushing James and I," Julch said. "Those (younger) guys are already fast, strong and know the system. It's just a matter of time. That's quite a group, which is something that we don't have in the senior or junior (class) right now in terms of numbers."

Indeed, only one junior, current starter Russ Hochstein, even figures into Nebraska's offensive line plans.

When 6-foot-1, 300-pound senior Jason Schwab went down in the pre-season, Dave Volk, a 6-foot-5, 295-pound sophomore, moved into the starting lineup.

"As the season has gone on," Volk said after the Kansas State game, "we're starting to get 5, 6 and 7 yards a pop. That gets the backs fired up. But it also gets the offensive line going, too."

The back-up tackles are now both sophomores — 6-3, 295-pound Jon Rutherford and 6-5, 295-pound Kyle Kollmorgen.

"It's important for the team and the future senior leadership that we get as good as we can starting now," said Rutherford, who moved into the position of "swing" tackle to replace Volk after Volk replaced Schwab.

"It's a great group," Rutherford said. "We'll get our chance. Look at Dave. He kept working hard, and now, even though the circumstances weren't what we'd have picked, he's the starter."

That chance can't come soon enough for most of the younger linemen, but there is a tradition and pride among the offensive line that is a unique part of Nebraska's football folklore.

"That's how it is at Nebraska," Kollmorgen said. "You work out hard, practice hard and wait to get your chance."

The backup guards are Steve Alstadt, a 6-5, 280-pound sophomore and true freshman Toniui Fonoti, a mammoth 6-4, 330-pounder.

"I feel like I'm still a student," Fonoti said. "I'm just learning, but this will help in the future."

Fonoti signed at 300 pounds and, after working out, he came to Nebraska an inch taller and with 30 more pounds of muscle. Volk, standing next to Rutherford — talk about casting an evening shadow — said the younger line needs to realize its vast potential.

"We've got room for improvement," Volk said. "We feel good about what we can accomplish."

The Huskers have been multi-faceted on offense this year.

"If defenses try and put everyone in a box, it makes sense to pass the ball," Volk said with a shrug of his shoulders. "But there are times when we have to be able to run it. That's still the focus of this offense, and it always will be."

And the starting center might be the best player in the sophomore class — Dominic Raiola, who stands 6-2 and weighs 300 pounds.

"People look and see what we could have in two years on this line," Raiola said. "But you'll see it this year and next year, too. There's a lot of young guys ready and waiting to play on the line."

And the fellow lining up behind the line is just a sophomore — Eric Crouch. It is Crouch's leadership and attitude on the field that have the Huskers optimistic that smash-mouth football is still the entree of choice in Lincoln.

"I like his leadership. I like his poise. I like his calmness. But most of all, I admire his courage," Julch said. "I got beat on a play today, and Eric just got killed because of it. But he got right back up, patted me on the back and went right back to work. How can you not want to do your very best when you've got a guy like that running your team?"

Against A&M and K-State, the Huskers were executing the NU patented "wearing down" of the opposing defense. And that is a feeling like no other.

"As it (the season) has gone on, we've been able to do more things running the ball," said Crouch, who had 158 yards against Kansas State. "That's because of the great blocking we've got from the line." ■



Senior tackle Adam Julch (left) and assistant coach Milt Tenopir see a bright future for the offensive line.

Bob Schaller covers the Huskers for the Scottsbluff Star-Herald. He has also written several books, including "Touchdown Tommie" and "Roar of Silence: The Kenny Walker Story." Bob can be reached at schallerb@aol.com.

It Comes With The Territory

In his second year, Frank Solich appears to be getting more and more comfortable under the national spotlight



Curt McKEEVER

AS BIG GAMES GO, Frank Solich would have told you he was 18-5 heading into Nebraska's contest at Colorado the day after Thanksgiving last week.

Of course, that was his overall mark as his second season as the Huskers' head coach was winding down.

But if the mood he exhibited prior to the Nov. 13 Kansas State is any indication, Solich is getting more and more comfortable calling the shots under the national spotlight.

With Kansas State bringing an unbeaten team to Lincoln, the tone of some questions seemed to indicate that the game would boil down to how Solich would be able to match wits with the adaptable Bill Snyder.

Hey Coach, do you think you have enough seasoning to handle this one?

"Are you asking me if I feel like a red-shirt freshman playing quarterback?" Solich asked the Lincoln Journal Star's Steve Sipple before giving the young beat writer a grin and chuckle. It was a rare light moment from a coach who often looks more like he's trying to balance the state's budget than balance a football team's offense. And in Nebraska, it's always debatable whose job is more important.

Anyway, Solich isn't exactly fond of talking about how he thinks he's doing trying to maintain the lofty standards achieved first by the man who coached him, Bob Devaney, and then the person whom he learned under, Tom Osborne.

Nebraska's 41-15 win against Kansas State calmed the critics, but Solich knows they'll be quick to resurface at the next loss.

Before beating the fifth-ranked Wildcats, a Solich-coached Nebraska team had yet to win against a team ranked higher than it. After last season's Holiday Bowl loss to Arizona, he looked inconsolable. Sure, he'd had some nice wins — beating No. 9 Washington and No. 19 Missouri. But Texas ended NU's 47-game winning streak in Memorial Stadium, and the injury-plagued Huskers still finished with their worst record in three decades.

But if you thought it couldn't get any tougher for Solich after that, you'd be wrong.

"This team has faced more distractions," Solich said. "When that happens, it's more difficult for a coaching staff, too."

The brunt of the distractions occurred in late August and September.

First it was the Eric Crouch-Bobby Newcombe quarterback battle that threatened team unity. Then I-back Correll Buckhalter was missing from practice for three days following the season opener against Iowa. His running mate,

DeAngelo Evans, then quit after the California game and promptly blasted the program and Solich.

Solich begrudgingly admits letting on that it has been a rough road for him this season because he doesn't want that to cast his players in negative light. He is devout defender of his players. As his trademark saying goes, it's always time to move forward.

"It hasn't been difficult because of these players, or their approach, or their attitude. That has been tremendous," he said. "Same with the staff. But in some ways, it's been harder. But that's kind of the way it is in this profession and the way it is in this program. Nothing's going to be easy, necessarily."

Solich endured severe criticism for how he managed Nebraska's only loss, a 24-20 decision at Texas. The Huskers began their final drive without timeouts because they had been used earlier in the half to avoid delay-of-game penalties. Callers to radio shows and letters to newspapers urged him to consider hiring an offensive coordinator.

But Solich — the only head coach in the Big 12 who handles the offensive coordinator role — won't have it.

"I think I have tremendous knowledge of this offense — as much knowledge as anybody out there," he said. "Consequently, I wouldn't bring in a coordinator unless I was ready to change offense. I think the staff we have works well in producing this offense. And I enjoy that part of it. But some of it still comes down to wanting to make sure things go right in the early stages."

For now, he has no plans to stop calling plays for the Huskers, even if others have a different opinion.

Speaking of that, Solich labels himself just "fair" in regards to handling criticism from those outside the NU program.

"I think in this business you need to move along without letting it be a factor. That's hard to do," he said. "Sometimes you find yourself wanting to react. Really, the best thing, generally, is to not react. But there are some things you just have to react to. But if you start reacting to every little thing, that doesn't serve anybody any good."

Just like it would do Solich no good to say any one game is bigger than another. Unless Nebraska is playing for a national championship, the first time he says anything like that you can well pretty well figure the pressure is getting to him. I just wouldn't hold my breath waiting for that to occur. ■



Frank Solich says he does not plan to hire an offensive coordinator.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.

It's a Rematch of 1996 Game

Longhorns will look to rebound after 20-16 loss to Texas A&M

There are similarities. Three years ago, Nebraska took a 10-1 record into the inaugural Big 12 Championship Game. After an early shocker at Arizona State, the Huskers had won nine straight games and carried a No. 3 ranking into the Dec. 7, 1996, game at the Trans World Dome in St. Louis.

Texas, which entered the game 7-4 and unranked, prevailed 37-27, knocking the Huskers out of a Sugar Bowl berth opposite Florida State.

That Longhorn team, however,

Tentative 2 Deeps

NEBRASKA OFFENSE

SE	3	Matt Davison**	6-1	180	Jr.
	9	Wilson Thomas	6-5	210	Fr.
LT	69	Adam Julch***	6-5	320	Sr.
	66	Jon Rutherford*	6-3	295	So.
LG	63	James Sherman***	6-4	295	Sr.
	77	Toniu Fonoti	6-4	330	Fr.
C	54	Dominic Raiola*	6-2	295	So.
	51	Matt Baldwin**	6-2	285	Sr.
RG	55	Russ Hochstein**	6-3	280	Jr.
	64	Steve Alstadt	6-5	275	So.
RT	58	Dave Volk*	6-5	295	So.
	75	Kyle Kollmorgen*	6-5	290	So.
TE	85	T.J. DeBates***	6-3	250	Sr.
and	87	Tracey Wistrom	6-5	220	So.
QB	7	Eric Crouch*	6-1	195	So.
	14	Jeff Perino*	6-2	210	Sr.
FB	15	Willie Miller**	6-1	240	Jr.
	35	Tyrone Uhler	6-0	230	Fr.
IB	38	Dan Alexander**	6-0	245	Jr.
	36	Correll Buckhalter**	6-0	225	Jr.
WB	82	Sean Applegate**	5-9	185	Sr.
and	12	Bobby Newcombe**	6-0	195	Jr.
PK	26	Josh Brown	6-2	185	Fr.

NEBRASKA DEFENSE

LR	81	Aaron Wills***	6-2	250	Sr.
	57	Chris Kelsay	6-5	255	Fr.
NT	76	Steve Warren***	6-2	315	Sr.
	90	Jason Lohr*	6-2	275	So.
DT	91	Loran Kaiser**	6-4	290	Jr.
	71	Matt McGinn	6-1	280	So.
RR	93	Kyle Vanden Bosch*	6-4	270	Jr.
	98	Demoine Adams	6-2	225	Fr.
SLB	37	Tony Ortiz***	6-1	220	Sr.
-or-	46	Brian Shaw**	6-1	220	Sr.
MLB	13	Carlos Polk**	6-2	250	Jr.
	48	Jamie Burrow*	6-1	235	So.
WLB	27	Eric Johnson***	6-1	205	Sr.
	50	Julius Jackson***	6-1	240	Sr.
LCB	3	Keyuo Craver*	5-10	190	So.
	5	DeJuan Groce	5-10	190	Fr.
FS	19	Clint Finley**	6-0	205	Jr.
or	14	Dion Booker*	6-1	205	So.
ROV	21	Mike Brown***	5-10	205	Sr.
	25	Joe Walker**	5-10	195	Jr.
RCB	22	Ralph Brown***	5-10	180	Sr.
	18	Jeff Hemje	6-0	185	So.
P	17	Dan Hadenfeldt*	5-11	195	Sr.

TEXAS

Record 8-3

A 28	N. Carolina St.	L, 23-20
S 4	Stanford	W, 69-17
S 11	@ Rutgers	W, 38-21
S 18	Rice	W, 18-13
S 25	@ Baylor	W, 62-0
O 9	Kansas State	L, 35-17
O 9	Oklahoma	W, 38-28
O 23	Nebraska	W, 24-20
O 30	@ Iowa St.	W, 44-41
N 6	@ Okla. St.	W, 34-21
N 13	Texas Tech	W, 58-7
N 26	@ Texas A&M	L, 20-16

NEBRASKA

Record 10-1

S 4	@ Iowa	W, 42-7
S 11	California	W, 45-0
S 18	So. Mississippi	W, 20-13
S 25	@ Missouri	W, 40-10
O 2	Oklahoma St.	W, 38-14
O 9	Iowa St.	W, 49-14
O 23	@ Texas	L, 24-20
O 30	@ Kansas	W, 24-17
N 6	Texas A&M	W, 37-0
N 13	Kansas St.	W, 41-15
N 26	@ Colorado	W, 33-30
D 4	Texas	

entered the title tilt with a four-game win streak, including a 51-15 triumph over Texas A&M the previous week.

Three years later, Texas will play for the Big 12 title a second time, sporting an 8-3 mark and coming off a 20-16 loss to the Aggies that snapped a five-game winning streak and most likely dropped the Longhorns out of the top 10.

MAJOR CHANGE

Sophomore quarterback Major Applewhite had a stomach virus and did not start against A&M. Freshman Chris Simms, the son of former NFL star Phil Simms, made his first collegiate start, snapping Applewhite's streak of 21 consecutive starts.

Simms led the Longhorns to two first-half touchdowns, completing 8-of-16 passes for 116 yards, but he wilted in the second half under a tough Aggie pass rush.

Simms completed just two passes for 14 yards in the second half before Applewhite checked in. The Longhorns gained just 71 yards in the fourth quarter and went three and out on Applewhite's first two series. He drove the Longhorns to the A&M 46 on their last possession but fumbled when he was sacked with 23 seconds left.

Applewhite, Texas' first 3,000-yard passer, was 5-for-11 for 53 yards. He broke the Big 12 single-season passage yardage record of 3,156 set by former

TEXAS
(8-3)

VS

NEBRASKA
(10-1)

Big 12 Championship



Dec. 4, 1999 • 2:30 p.m. (CST) • ABC •
Alamodome • San Antonio, Texas

Colorado quarterback Koy Detmer, who passed for 3,156 yards in 1996.

TEXAS TURNOVERS

Texas has forced 30 turnovers and turned them into 107 points.

The Longhorns have committed 16 turnovers, and opponents have converted them into 33 points, resulting in a 74-point differential.

MITCHELL MOVES UP

Hodges Mitchell had 102 yard rush-

Tentative 2 Deeps

TEXAS DEFENSE

LE	49	Aaron Humphrey***	6-3	260	Sr.
	40	Cory Redding	6-5	245	Fr.
LT	64	Casey Hampton**	6-1	305	Jr.
	51	Brandon Nava**	6-3	285	Sr.
RT	73	Shaun Rogers**	6-4	315	Jr.
	44	Cole Pittman	6-5	265	Fr.
RE	91	Cedric Woodard***	6-3	295	Sr.
	84	J.J. Kelly**	6-2	255	Jr.
SLB	38	Aaron Babino***	6-1	235	Sr.
or	39	Tyrone Jones	6-4	230	So.
MLB	4	De'Andre Lewis*	6-1	238	So.
	56	Marcus Wilkins*	6-2	225	So.
WLB	2	Everick Rawls	6-1	230	So.
	41	Jamal Joyner	6-2	205	Fr.
LCB	5	Ahmad Brooks	5-8	182	So.
	1	Ervis Hill*	5-9	182	So.
FS	24	Greg Brown*	6-2	200	Jr.
	26	Terrell Dillon*	5-8	175	Sr.
SS	23	Lee Jackson*	6-3	205	So.
	8	Jon Wyndham*	6-1	187	So.
RCB	17	Joe Walker**	6-0	185	Jr.
or	1	Ervis Hill*	5-9	182	So.
P	33	Ryan Long*	6-1	190	Jr.

TEXAS OFFENSE

FL	9	Kwame Cavil**	6-2	205	Jr.
	12	J. Thompson**	6-0	180	Jr.
LT	70	Leonard Davis*	6-6	3067	Jr.
or	66	Cory Quye*	6-6	325	Jr.
LG	72	Roger Roesler**	6-5	315	Sr.
	75	Derrick Dockery	6-6	335	Fr.
C	62	Matt Anderson*	6-4	310	So.
or	78	Marcel Blanchard*	6-4	305	Jr.
RG	76	A. Kirk-Hughes*	6-3	320	So.
	62	Matt Anderson*	6-4	310	So.
RT	66	Cory Quye*	6-6	325	Jr.
or	63	Mike Williams*	6-6	339	So.
TE	81	Mike Jones	6-4	260	So.
	87	Chris Smith***	6-5	265	Sr.
QB	11	Major Applewhite*	6-1	205	So.
	8	Chris Simms	6-5	210	Fr.
RB	3	Hodges Mitchell**	5-7	190	Jr.
	28	Victor Ike	5-11	195	Fr.
RB	44	Ricky Brown***	6-0	225	Sr.
	37	Chris Robertson*	6-1	213	So.
SE	22	Ryan Nunez*	5-9	185	Sr.
	2	Montrell Flowers	5-9	182	So.
PK	13	Kris Stockton**	5-9	195	Jr.

PICKS

Brian Hill
Editor

Nebraska 37, Texas 26

The kicking game will be important, and Nebraska's Dan Hadenfeldt and Josh Brown are coming off fine performances. Nebraska is due to hold onto the football and due to beat the Longhorns.

Mike Babcock
Contributing Editor
Nebraska 31, Texas 28

Beating a team twice in the same season is difficult enough without that team's being Nebraska. The Cornhuskers should be able to make adjustments to get enough pressure on Major Applewhite to win. But it won't be easy in a domed stadium, where wind and weather conditions won't be factors.

Bob Schaller
Contributing Writer
Nebraska 41, Texas 15

Payback time, once and for all. Major Applewhite has looked like Captain America against the Huskers but looked like Col. Klink against lesser foes. This time, Nebraska rises to the task.

Terry Douglass
Grand Island Independent
Sports Editor
Nebraska 31, Texas 24

Like a young child who can't seem to register that fire is hot, I'm sticking my fingers in the flame once again. Three times is the end of Texas' charm as an underdog winner over Nebraska. Look for the Cornhuskers to bust out to a big lead early and — this time — hold off a Major Applewhite-directed Longhorn rally late.

ing against A&M to give him 1,329 and move him past Ricky Williams (1,272, 1996) and into fifth place on the UT single-season rushing chart.

SCORING RECORD

In recording their lowest scoring output of the season, the Longhorns broke the school record for points in a season with 438. The previous mark was 432 set in 1996. ■

BIG 12 CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES

Texas 37, Nebraska 27
Dec. 7, 1996

Trans World Dome, St. Louis

Texas coach John Mackovic gambled and came away a genius for a day.

Nebraska's Grant Wistrom came away inclined to return for his senior season. "I'm not leaving here without winning," he told reporters after the first Big 12 championship game.

The junior rush end had been thinking about declaring for the NFL draft, and though he wouldn't commit to coming back, "I just want to keep playing for Nebraska," he said.

He needed to finish the business of winning another national championship. And the Cornhuskers would have had an opportunity to do so had it not been for the upset by Texas.

With a victory, Nebraska would have advanced to the Sugar Bowl to play Florida State.

And after Ohio State's upset of Arizona State in the Rose Bowl game, the national championship would have been the Cornhuskers' for the taking. It was oh-so-close.

Texas had a 30-27 with two minutes remaining and faced fourth-and-1 at its own 28-yard line. Instead of punting, however, the Longhorns went for the first down.

Quarterback James Brown, who completed 19-of-28 passes for 353 yards and one touchdown, threw a pass to tight end Derek Lewis for a 61-yard gain, which set up a clinching touchdown.

"It was a great call," said Cornhusker defensive coordinator Charlie McBride.

Wistrom didn't dispute that.

However, "if it hadn't worked, it would have been a really dumb call," he said.

Nebraska 54, Texas A&M 15
Dec. 6, 1997

Alamodome, San Antonio

Texas pulled the upset in the 1996 Big 12 playoff. Texas A&M paid the price a year later.

"It's embarrassing what happened to us last year," Nebraska defensive tackle Jason Peter said after the Cornhuskers made short work of an A&M team that knew it would have to get off to a good start.

On the game's first play from scrimmage, Peter dropped Aggies quarterback Brannndon Stewart for a 5-yard loss. The sack, the first of six by Nebraska, set the tone. The Cornhuskers scored on all seven possessions in the first half to take a 37-3

lead to the locker room at the intermission.

A&M was never in the game.

Quarterback Scott Frost, who hadn't been included on the all-conference first team, took out his frustrations on the Aggies, directing Nebraska's offense to 536 yards — 280 of which he produced, by completing 12-of-18 passes for 201 and rushing for 79 and two touchdowns.

"Scott Frost is such a great competitor, and he's so smart," said A&M inside linebacker Dat Nguyen. "He knew where our weaknesses were, every time they lined up."

He also complemented the rushing of I-back Ahman Green, who gained 179 yards and scored three touchdowns. "I always feel rushing yards are better than passing yards because 99 percent of the time, the rushing team wins the game," Coach Tom Osborne said. "That's why we run the ball — to win."

Coach R.C. Slocum's Aggies weren't about to argue the point.

Texas A&M 36, Kansas St. 33 (2 OT)
Dec. 5, 1998

Trans World Dome, St. Louis

At the end of the third quarter of the third Big 12 playoff, Kansas State fans tossed tortilla chips onto the artificial turf at the Trans World Dome. The chips were symbolic of the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl, which would play host to the Bowl Championship Series national title game.

And the Wildcats were well on their way to Tempe, Ariz. With only 15 minutes remaining, they led 27-12. That Texas A&M would make up the deficit seemed highly unlikely.

It still seemed unlikely with three minutes remaining in regulation, after a fourth-down pass by Aggies quarterback Brannndon Stewart fell incomplete to give Kansas State the ball.

The Wildcats led 27-19.

"We knew we had to make something happen on defense," said A&M linebacker Dat Nguyen.

What happened was, Kansas State quarterback Michael Bishop had the ball stripped and the Aggies record at the Kansas State 35-yard line. Four plays later, Stewart and Sirr Parker teamed on a 9-yard touchdown pass, then teamed on a two-point conversion to tie the score.

The teams traded field goals in the first overtime, but while Kansas State had to settle for another field goal in the second overtime, A&M got the winning touchdown on another Stewart-to-Parker pass. ■



Mike Brown (above) looked like the hero when he stripped the football from Cortlen Johnson, and Nebraska gained possession deep in Colorado territory with about two minutes remaining. But the Huskers returned the favor on the next play, when Dan Alexander couldn't handle a pitch from Eric Crouch. Alexander earlier scored three touchdowns, including a 50-yard run on the game's first play from scrimmage (above right).



Whew!

***Last-second field goal
miss gives Huskers
new life in dramatic
33-30 overtime victory***

**Story by Mike Babcock
Photos by Scott Bruhn**

Nebraska's season came down to a scant second, the time it takes to say: "One Mississippi."

That instant, at the end of regulation in a 33-30 overtime victory against Colorado, might very well determine how Coach Frank Solich's second team will be remembered.

Yet the No. 3-ranked Cornhuskers could do little to shape it.

Ostensibly, the moment belonged to Colorado senior Jeremy Aldrich, for better or for worse. But it really wasn't his, according to Gary Barnett, the Buffaloes' first-year head coach.

"I told him not to take this one on his shoulders and not to take the blame," said Barnett. "I made sure he

heard that and that everybody else heard that. That's the life of the position.

"The moment in time wasn't his."

In a sense, the moment in time didn't belong to anyone, on either team.

"We got lucky," Nebraska I-back Dan Alexander said.

You probably know what happened. Aldrich missed on a 34-yard field goal attempt that, had it been good, would have given Colorado a remarkable comeback victory.

Instead, Nebraska limited the Buffaloes to three points, on an Aldrich field goal from about the same distance as the one he missed, and then it scored a touchdown to win.

Quarterback Eric Crouch muscled into the end zone from 1 yard out.

Despite the victory, which gives the Cornhuskers a 10-1 record and earns them a rematch with Texas in the Big 12 championship game at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas, their locker room was subdued afterward, according to rover Mike Brown. "It's kind of down," he said.

"It wasn't really a celebration," said Crouch. "It was more a sense of relief."

Aldrich, who had been successful on 15-of-22 field goal attempts to that point in the season, sent the ball just to the right of the goal posts at the south end of Folsom Field.

He had kicked field goals from 33 and 49 yards for Colorado's first six points. Clearly, "the odds of him missing that were not good," Nebraska cornerback Ralph Brown said.

Whether he did wasn't even an absolute. "Truthfully, from my angle, the field goal looked good," Nebraska place-kicker Josh Brown said. "Being a kicker, I have to feel for Jeremy."

His empathy for Aldrich's plight went only so far, however. "Our kickers did a ritual we call 'the circle of death' on the sideline to jinx him," said Josh Brown. "I guess it did."

Cornhusker defensive coordinator Charlie McBride dealt with the tension in a different way.

"I was under the bench somewhere," he said with a half-hearted laugh.

The Aldrich miss provided Nebraska's Alexander an opportu-



Nebraska linebacker Tony Ortiz (left) and rush end Aaron Wills sandwich Colorado running back Cortlen Johnson. Johnson rushed for 135 yards, the most by a CU player against the Huskers since Rashaan Salaam had 165 in 1993.

nity for redemption, something he shouldn't have needed, really, based on his performance overall.

The junior I-back scored three touchdowns as the Cornhuskers built a 24-3 halftime lead, running 50 yards on the game's first play from scrimmage, adding a second from 1 yard out and then running away from Colorado's Ben Kelly on a 80-yard play seven minutes into the second quarter.

Alexander finished with 180 yards rushing. But he lost two fumbles, the second of which came on a pitch from Crouch at the Colorado 15-yard line with 1:49 remaining in regulation.

Nebraska had just taken possession after Mike Brown stripped the ball from Buffaloes tailback Cortlen Johnson, following an 11-yard run. Cornerback Keyuo Craver recovered.

Johnson's fumble provided

redemption for Mike Brown, who had been unable to handle an on-sides kick, which had given Colorado possession and set up the tying touchdown.

The Cornhuskers fumbled eight times, in all, losing five.

"It was just another case of our offense not taking good care of the ball," said Crouch, who was charged with three of the fumbles, though none of the three were lost.

Alexander's redemption came in the overtime, when he carried twice for 14 of the 25 yards Nebraska needed for the winning touchdown. He got 11 of them to the Colorado 1-yard line.

He wanted "just one more chance," said Alexander, who was benched after losing a fumble on the first play from scrimmage in the previous game against Kansas State.

The Aldrich miss also provided

Solich with some measure of redemption for calling a play that involved an option pitch when the Cornhuskers were in field goal range.

"I took as much blame for that fumble as anybody," he said. "But we're an option team, and there's no hiding that. We've got to feel we can run the option against anybody, at any time."

Nevertheless, "would I run it again if I had it to do over? No."

Despite the two lost fumbles, Solich never considered replacing Alexander, even though he went into the game intending also to use redshirted freshman Dahrran Diedrick as well as Correll Buckhalter at I-back. Buckhalter carried five times for 24 yards. Diedrick didn't play.

When it comes to getting the tough yards, with the game on the line, "he's as good as it gets," Solich said of Alexander. "He's a tremendous player. You don't match that effort."

That was true of all who played, according to Mike Brown.

"We were giving a great effort," he said. "It had nothing to do with effort."

Nebraska seemed to be in cruise control after the second of two Josh Brown field goals made the score 27-3 with 2:31 remaining in the third quarter. But just as they did two years ago at Folsom Field, the Buffaloes staged a remarkable rally, directed by quarterback Mike Moschetti.

In a span of less than six minutes in the fourth quarter, Moschetti threw touchdown passes to John Minardi, Daniel Graham and Javon Green to set the stage for the dramatic finish.

Moschetti finished 21-of-41 for 317 yards, 188 of them in the fourth quarter.

Colorado, which had only 211 total yards after three quarters, finished with 504, compared to 400 for Nebraska, including 356 rushing. Crouch rushed for 123 yards on 19 carries.

"I was a little disappointed to let them come back and tie the game," said Cornhusker defensive tackle Steve Warren, who was battling a chest cold as well as the effects of high altitude.

"I was a little disappointed that we didn't blow them out."

That Nebraska didn't win impressively is likely to have a negative effect on its national champi-

4TH & 1NCHES

Notes And Quotes From The Colorado Game

HADENFELDT AVERAGES 57.6 YARDS PER PUNT

The Cornhuskers' Dan Hadenfeldt broke the school single-game record by averaging 57.6 yards on seven punts, five of which pinned Colorado inside its own 20-yard line. The previous record was 57.33 yards-per-punt, set by Dennis Claridge on three punts against Syracuse on Oct. 14, 1961.

"I'm thrilled with what I was able to contribute," Hadenfeldt said.

But, he added: "The win made the day."

ALEXANDER BREAKS LOOSE . . . TWICE

I-back Dan Alexander's 50-yard touchdown run on the game's first play from scrimmage was the longest of his career until the second quarter, when he ran 80 yards for a touchdown.

In three of Nebraska's previous five games at Folsom Field, the Cornhuskers scored a touchdown on their first play from scrimmage. Bryan Carpenter and Gerry Gdowski teamed on a pass play in 1989. Calvin Jones ran for a touchdown in 1993. And Ahman Green ran for a touchdown in 1995.

Alexander finished with a career-high 180 yards. It was the fifth time in his career that he has rushed for 100 or more yards in a game. He now has 852 yards rushing for the season.

Alexander's 11-yard run in overtime set up the winning touchdown from the 1-yard line. "That play came about because of the coaches," he said. "We had run that (play) several times before."

He was supposed to cut to the inside, "but I listened to the coaches and went to the outside."

CROUCH PASSES 2,000 YARDS IN TOTAL OFFENSE

Quarterback Eric Crouch also rushed for more than 100 yards, finishing with 123 on 19 carries. He rushed for 107 yards in the first half and now has 817 for the season to rank second on the team behind Alexander. Crouch's 2,031 yards of total offense rank eighth on Nebraska's single-season list.

He has broken the school total-offense record for a sophomore, previously held by Dave Humm.

Crouch already ranks fifth all-time among Cornhusker quarterbacks and 35th overall in rushing, with 1,276 yards. His 1,815 career-passing yards rank 11th at Nebraska. And his 3,091 yards of total offense are just 62 short of putting him on the Cornhuskers' career top 10.

The game was the third in a row in which Crouch rushed for 100 or more yards. He has scored at least one touchdown in eight consecutive games, and all but one game this season.

Alexander (135) and Crouch (137) each rushed for 100 yards against Texas A&M, and Alexander (135) and Buckhalter (127) each rushed for 100 yards in the Iowa State game.

MIKE BROWN CONTINUES TO MOVE UP TACKLE CHARTS

Senior rover Mike Brown was credited with an unofficial 11 tackles, which would move him from fifth to a tie with Lee Kunz (1976-78) for second on Nebraska's career list. Brown has 276 career tackles, including a team-high 85 this season. Jerry Murtaugh (1968-70) tops the career list with 342.

Senior cornerback Ralph Brown broke up one pass to increase his school career-record total to 46.

HUSKERS NO. 1 . . . IN FUMBLES

Nebraska went into the game leading the nation in fumbles. Considering the Cornhuskers fumbled eight times, losing five, against Colorado, they aren't likely to relinquish the lead.

They have lost 23-of-47 fumbles for the season, including 8-of-18 in the last two games.

"I don't know what those numbers say. I guess it means we have a great defense and some great special-teams play," said Coach Frank Solich. "To be 10-1 and lose that many fumbles, it seems strange. If you don't have a great football team, you don't overcome that statistic."

'WHAT CAN I SAY'

Colorado senior Jeremy Aldrich, whose 34-yard field goal attempt went right with no time remaining in regulation, didn't show up for post-game interviews. The Colorado sports information office indicated that Aldrich said only: "I missed it. What can I say?"

ANOTHER 10 FOR HUSKERS

Nebraska has now won 10 or more games in six seasons during the 1990s. ■

BY THE NUMBERS

Nebraska vs. Colorado
Nov. 26, 1999 • Boulder, Colo.

Score By Quarters

Nebraska	14	10	3	0	6	—	33
Colorado	0	3	0	24	3	—	30

Team Stats

	NU	CU
First Downs	14	22
Rushing	11	6
Passing	2	15
Penalty	1	1
Rushing Attempts	51	47
Yards Gained Rushing	375	213
Yards Lost Rushing	19	47
Net Yards Rushing	356	166
Net Yards Passing	44	338
Passes Attempted	42	12
Passes Completed	22	4
Had Intercepted	0	0
Total Plays	63	89
Total Net Yards	400	504
Avg. Gain Per Play	6.3	5.7
Fumbles-Lost	8-5	6-2
Penalties-Yards	4-27	7-61
Punts-Yards	7-403	9-354
Avg. Per Punt	57.6	39.3
Punt Returns-Yards	3-6	4-16
Interceptions-Yards	0-0	0-0
Fumble Returns-Yards	0-0	0-0
Kickoff Returns-Yards	3-43	4-57
Possession Time	26:11	33:49

Scoring

NU — Dan Alexander 50-yard run (Josh Brown kick)
NU — Alexander 1-yard run (Brown kick)
NU — Brown 34-yard field goal
CU — Jeremy Aldrich 33-yard field goal
NU — Alexander 80-yard run (Brown kick)
NU — Brown 37-yard field goal
CU — Aldrich 49-yard field goal
CU — John Minardi 14-yard pass from Mike Moschetti (Aldrich kick)
CU — Daniel Graham 3-yard pass from Moschetti (Aldrich kick)
CU — Javon Green 21-yard pass from Moschetti (Aldrich kick)
CU — Aldrich 33-yard field goal
NU — Eric Crouch 1-yard run (no PAT attempt)
Att. — 52,946
Temp. — 60



Eric Crouch rushed for more than 100 yards for the third straight game and passed the 2,000-yard mark in total offense.

Individual Leaders

NEBRASKA

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Alexander, D.	17	180	10.6	80	3
Crouch, E.	19	123	6.5	46	1
Miller, W.	8	25	3.1	6	0
Buckhalter, C.	5	24	4.8	6	0
Newcombe, T.	1	3	3.0	3	0
Uhlir, T.	1	1	1.0	1	0

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	4-12-0	33.3	44	0

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Davison, M.	2	28	14.0	24	0
Wistrom, T.	1	12	12.0	12	0
Newcombe, B.	1	4	4.0	4	0

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	7	403	57.6	64

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Walker, J.	2	2	1.0	2	0
Craver, K.	1	4	4.0	4	0

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Stella, R.	2	43	21.5	23	0

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Brown, M.	7	3	10	0	0	0
Warren, S.	7	3	10	1-1	0	2-15
Polk, C.	6	4	10	1-4	0	1-4
Lohr, J.	5	3	8	1-5	0	1-5
Craver, K.	6	1	7	0	0	0
Booker, D.	3	4	7	0	0	0
Wills, A.	1	5	6	0	0	0
Kaiser, L.	4	0	4	0	0	0
Brown, R.	3	1	4	1-3	0	0
Vanden Bosch, K.	2	2	4	1-6	0	1-6
Jackson, J.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Johnson, E.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Ortiz, T.	3	0	3	0	0	0
Finley, C.	2	0	2	1-9	0	1-9
Walker, J.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Shaw, B.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Kelsay, C.	1	1	2	0	0	0

COLORADO

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Johnson, C.	25	135	5.4	27	0
Andrews, D.	6	13	2.2	4	0
Moschetti, M.	11	11	1.0	22	0
Stiggers, M.	1	8	8.0	8	0
Cherrington, D.	3	8	2.7	4	0

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Moschetti, M.	21-41-0	51.2	317	3
Leonard, G.	1-1-0	100.0	21	0

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Green, J.	5	100	20.0	29	1
Hollowell, R.	5	56	11.2	19	0
Stiggers, M.	3	49	16.3	27	0
Minardi, J.	3	68	22.7	36	1
Graham, D.	2	6	3.0	3	1
Wright, N.	1	21	21.0	21	0
Johnson, C.	1	19	19.0	19	0
McReady, E.	1	10	10.0	10	0
Cherrington, D.	1	9	9.0	9	0

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Pietsch, N.	9	354	39.3	52

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Kelly, B.	3	15	5.0	14	0
Hollowell, R.	1	1	1.0	1	0

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Cormier, C.	1	17	17.0	17	0
Kelly, B.	1	16	16.0	16	0
Hollowell, R.	1	14	14.0	14	0
Wheeler, D.	1	10	10.0	10	0

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Sykes, J.	7	8	15	1-1	0	0
Barnes, R.	9	5	14	1-1	0	0
Peeke, A.	4	6	10	2-3	0	0
Wahlroos, D.	5	4	9	0	0	0
Lewis, M.	3	4	7	0	0	0
Bannan, J.	4	0	4	1-4	0	0
Wheeler, D.	3	1	4	0	0	0
Kelly, B.	2	2	4	0	0	0
McDonnell, B.	2	2	4	1-3	0	0
Jones, F.	2	1	3	0	0	0
Warren, J.	2	3	0	0	0	0
Gregorak, T.	1	2	3	0	0	0

'99 SEASON STATS

Name	G	Att.	Yds.	YPG	TD
Alexander, D.	11	130	852	77.5	8
Crouch, E.	11	157	817	74.3	14
Buckhalter, C.	10	91	526	52.6	6
Diedrick, D.	10	54	307	30.7	2
Miller, W.	9	47	178	19.8	2
Newcombe, B.	11	37	87	7.9	3
Evans, D.	2	19	74	37.0	0
Perino, J.	6	15	65	11.2	0
Uhlir, T.	10	11	30	3.0	0
Kingston, B.	8	6	19	2.4	0

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	11	77-146-3	52.7	1,214	7
Newcombe, B.	11	11-18-1	61.1	246	2
Perino, J.	6	0-1-0	00.0	0	0
Chrisman, J.	2	0-4-0	00.0	0	0

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	YPG	TD
Davison, M.	11	27	422	15.6	38.4	2
Newcombe, B.	11	17	232	13.6	21.1	3
Wistrom, T.	11	16	429	26.8	39.0	2
Applegate, S.	11	5	103	20.6	9.4	1
Alexander, D.	11	4	56	14.0	5.1	0
Golliday, A.	11	3	53	17.7	4.8	0
Miller, W.	9	3	26	8.7	2.9	0
Buckhalter, C.	10	3	21	7.0	2.1	0
Crouch, E.	11	2	46	23.0	4.2	1
Gibson, J.	9	2	19	9.5	2.1	0
London, F.	10	2	11	5.5	1.1	0

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Brown, J.	11	17	12	37

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	56	2,570	45.9	73

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	S/Yds.
Brown, M.	10	44	30	74	7-36	5-40	1-10
Polk, C.	10	29	41	70	10-52	0	5-53
Wills, A.	10	22	26	48	6-14	0	1-5
Craver, K.	10	28	13	41	2-3	3-18	0
Ortiz, T.	10	15	19	34	6-30	0	3-26
Warren, S.	10	15	17	32	11-67	0	6-51
Vanden Bosch, K.	9	18	12	30	8-44	0	3-5-38
Johnson, E.	7	11	19	30	7-25	0	4-20
Brown, R.	10	17	11	28	2-29	2-66	0
Jackson, J.	10	13	15	28	7-26	3-40	3-21

TEAM STATISTICS		NU	OPP			
Total Offensive Yards		4,417	2,850			
Plays		744	744			
Average Per Play		5.9	3.8			
Average Per Game		401.5	259.1			
Net Rushing Yards		2,957	920			
Attempts		575	398			
TDs Rushing		35	6			
Net Passing Yards		1,460	1,930			
Completions		88	150			
Average Per Pass		8.6	5.6			
Average Per Catch		16.6	12.9			
Average Per Game		132.7	175.1			
TDs Passing		9	11			
Sacks By-Yards		47-359	16-93			
Fumbles-Lost		47-23	28-16			
Penalties-Yards		59-546	72-570			
Scoring	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	OT	TOT
NU	101	91	97	94	6	389
Opponents	12	22	27	80	3	144

onship hopes, which depends on the Cornhuskers' Bowl Championship Series ranking.

"We just have to focus on the Big 12 (championship) now," Ralph Brown said.

"Whatever happens, happens," said Alexander.

You just never know what might happen, as the Aldrich miss proved.

"I saw it drifting to the right, and hoped it would keep going," Ralph Brown said.

"After we got the push, I turned and looked," said Warren. "It kind of veered off to the right."

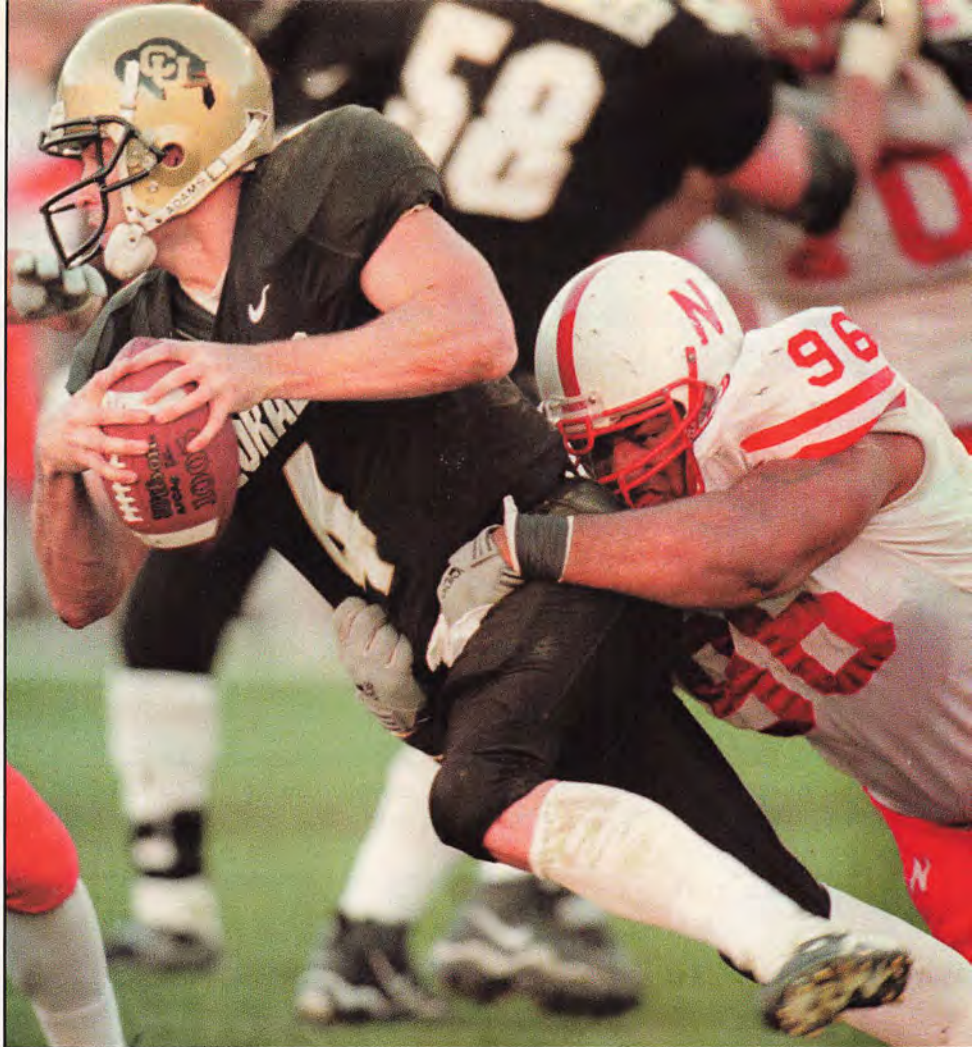
He had no doubt that it missed. "But it was close enough," he said.

"Thank God, was what I said. Thank God."

But divine intervention didn't explain that one second, either.

"Anything can happen in football, period," Cornhusker strong-side linebacker Tony Ortiz said.

Nothing else need have been said. ■



Defensive tackle Steve Warren sacks Colorado quarterback Mike Moschetti for a 14-yard loss. Warren was credited with 10 tackles.

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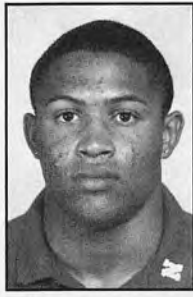
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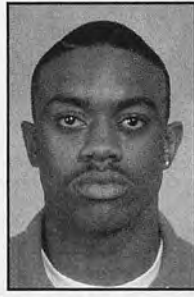
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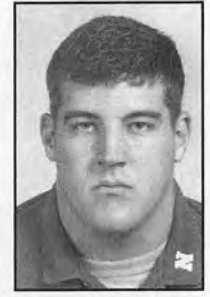
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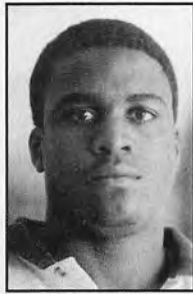
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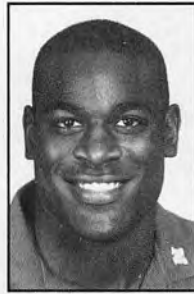
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P Des Moines, Iowa



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C Osceola, Neb



Larry Henderson
SE Los Angeles, Calif.



Julius Jackson
WLB Gainesville, Texas



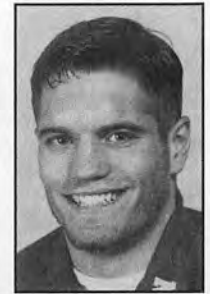
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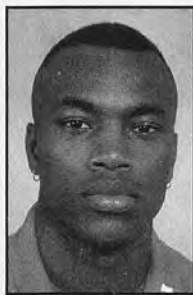
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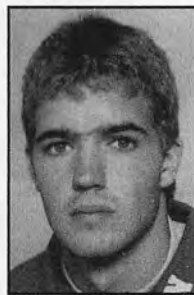
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Tony Ortiz
SLB New York, N.Y.



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Eric Ryan
RRE Overton, Neb.



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OT Eagan, Minn



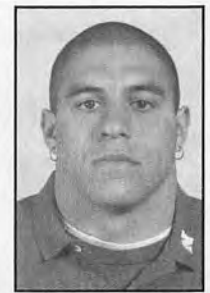
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SLB DeWeese, Neb.



James Sherman
OG LaVerne, Calif



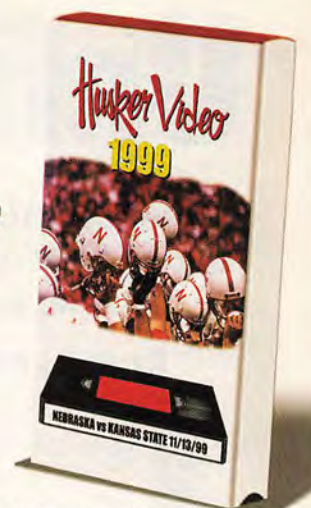
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CUT & SEND

Unfinished Business

Injured tackle Schwab hopes for another shot at final season

By Mike Babcock

Jason Schwab isn't big on watching movies. But for the first few weeks of his freshman year at Nebraska, it was as if he were preparing for a career as a movie critic.

He would rent as many as six movies at a time from Blockbuster Video and watch them one after the other in his dorm room on the eighth floor of the Abel residence hall.

It wasn't unusual for him to sit up until 3 a.m. watching movies.

He rented several at a time because he had to rely on someone else for transportation to and from the rental store. And he often was assessed late charges for the same reason.

"Those guys made a fortune off me," he said with a laugh.

"You feel like the biggest loser. But it's something to help keep your mind off stuff. My roommate always went home (for the weekend), so I was stuck here alone.

"You almost feel like you're in prison in that dorm room, as small as it is."

He remembers in particular sitting in the room in early September of 1995, considering his plight. The Nebraska football team was in East Lansing, Mich., to play Michigan State, and "all my buddies here, people I knew on the team, had gone home for the weekend," he said.

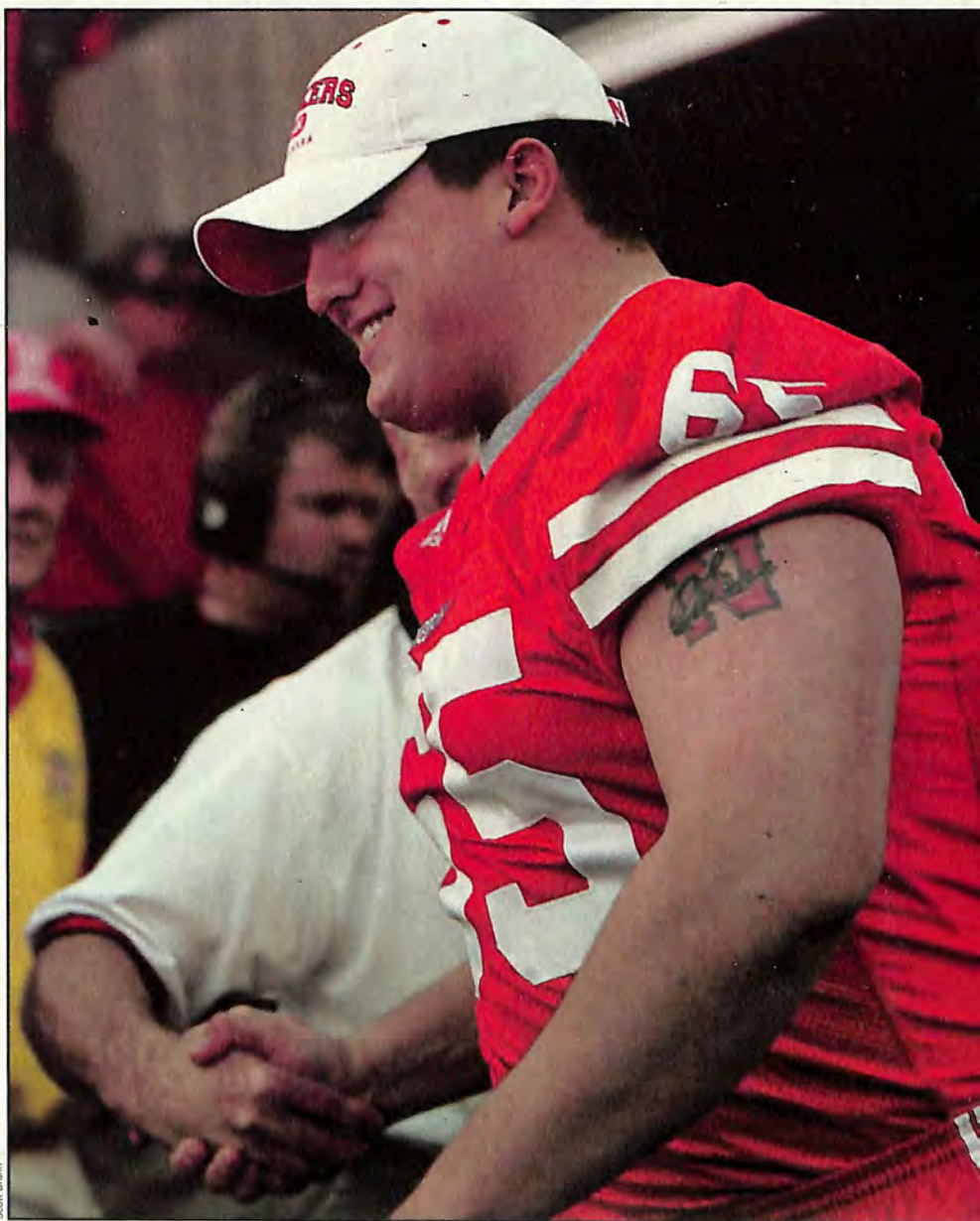
"I just sat there and thought: 'What am I doing here?'"

What he was doing was redshirting, after walking out to the football team. In that sense, he was no different than many others. The difference was, he knew hardly anyone. So he watched movies.

"My first two months here were probably the most depressing time of my life," he said.

Four-and-a-half years later, he considers Nebraska his home. And he's hoping to stay for another year, even though he is about to receive a degree in communication studies.

The university will petition the



Jason Schwab gets a handshake from Coach Frank Solich as he is introduced with the other seniors before the Kansas State game.

NCAA on his behalf for a sixth season of eligibility.

The petition will be filed in early January, after the Cornhuskers' bowl game. And he should know whether or not he has been granted another season by the end of the month.

"To be honest, I would be surprised if I don't get it, knock on wood," said Schwab.

He is proceeding as if he will be allowed to play next season. But you never know.

"If I get it, I get it," he said. "If I don't, it's too bad."

His situation is unique. He sat out his first season at Nebraska as a redshirt, which is standard procedure for most freshmen and walkons in particular, and he missed all of his second season because of a broken ankle, suffered early on. "I never played a down," he said.

He came into this season as a returning starter at offensive tackle but suffered torn ligaments in his right knee on the first day of practice in full pads and has been sidelined since.

When the knee injury occurred, during a pass-protection drill inside

Cook Pavilion, "the first thing that went through my mind was: 'That's it. That's the luck I've got. That's what's been dealt to me.' But then they started talking about possibly getting a sixth year," he said.

That possibility has been "a motivational factor, to get ready for spring ball."

Should he be granted the additional season, "I'll be 100 percent by the spring," he said. "They say six months, so that's what I'm going by. I'm a little ahead of schedule right now. I think if I get that extra year, when I come back, I'll be twice the football player I was before I was hurt."

"And I'll be hungry, man."

He has some unfinished business, a commitment to fulfill.

"I'm not ready to leave here yet," he said. "I've got one more year to play, to give to Nebraska. I don't feel that I've served my purpose here yet, if you want to say that."

"I don't feel that my career is complete without that extra year. It's something I want to do and something I feel that I committed to do, was to play that last year."

What began as the worst of times has become the best of times for Schwab, who rose from walkon obscurity to earn a scholarship and become an integral part of the offensive line.

He had no football scholarship offers from major colleges because of a knee injury that sidelined him his senior season at Cretin-Derham Hall High School in Eagan, Minn. — where his older brother was a friend and teammate of Florida State quarterback Chris Weinke.

Several Big Ten schools had been interested. "But as soon as I got hurt, they all dumped me," Schwab said. "Nebraska was the only one that stuck with me. That's why I think Nebraska has been as successful as it is. They don't give up on people. And I just thank them for not quitting on me."

After the injury, "they're the only school that showed interest."

He might have given up on himself after the broken ankle his second year. But he didn't, playing as a backup to All-Big 12 right tackle Eric Anderson on the 1997 national championship team and then becoming the starter. He was the only interior lineman to start every game last season.

The friendships are probably the most important part of his experience, however.

"That's another thing that was hard, not to be able to see them out, (to play) our last season together," he said. "If I get another year, that will be

almost like a culture shock for me, not being with my class, the ones I came in with. It'll be a little different . . . real different."

Schwab was among the 27 seniors who were introduced prior to the final home game against Kansas State. His parents were at the game, and "they were emotional," he said.

"I remember the night I got hurt, my dad, on the phone, was just in shock. He couldn't believe it. He called me at 3 in the morning and talked about it. He couldn't sleep. He said: 'I don't know what to tell you. It's eating me up. I don't know why this stuff happens.' He's been great."

Those first couple of months Schwab was at Nebraska, his parents sent him the Robert Redford movie "The Natural," a fanciful baseball

story based on the novel written by Bernard Malamud.

"I watched that thing like four times in a row," Schwab said.

"As soon as it would get done, I would rewind it and play it again."

Later, over a Thanksgiving vacation when the football team was housed at the Nebraska Center on East Campus, Schwab could see Abel Hall from his room. "I can remember counting the windows down, figuring out which one (room) I was in, and thinking: 'Thank God I'm not there.'"

He no longer felt like a loser by then. And Nebraska had become his home.

"It will be a sad day when I leave here," he said.

He's hoping to play another season before that day. ■



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HOOPS

Seeking an Identity

With so many new teammates, senior Florence knows there'll be ups and downs

Nebraska men's basketball fans will have to bear with Coach Danny Nee's 14th team. It might take a while for the Cornhuskers to establish an identity, according to Larry Florence.

"We're going to have ups and downs," Florence said.

"Any time you get new teammates, you're going to have ups and downs. But I feel that after a while, once everybody gets on the same page, we'll have a really good team."

Florence was speaking after Nebraska's final exhibition, which provided evidence of the point he was trying to make — about the



Senior Cookie Belcher's status for this season remains in doubt as he recovers from a wrist injury.

Cornhuskers' inconsistency, not their potential.

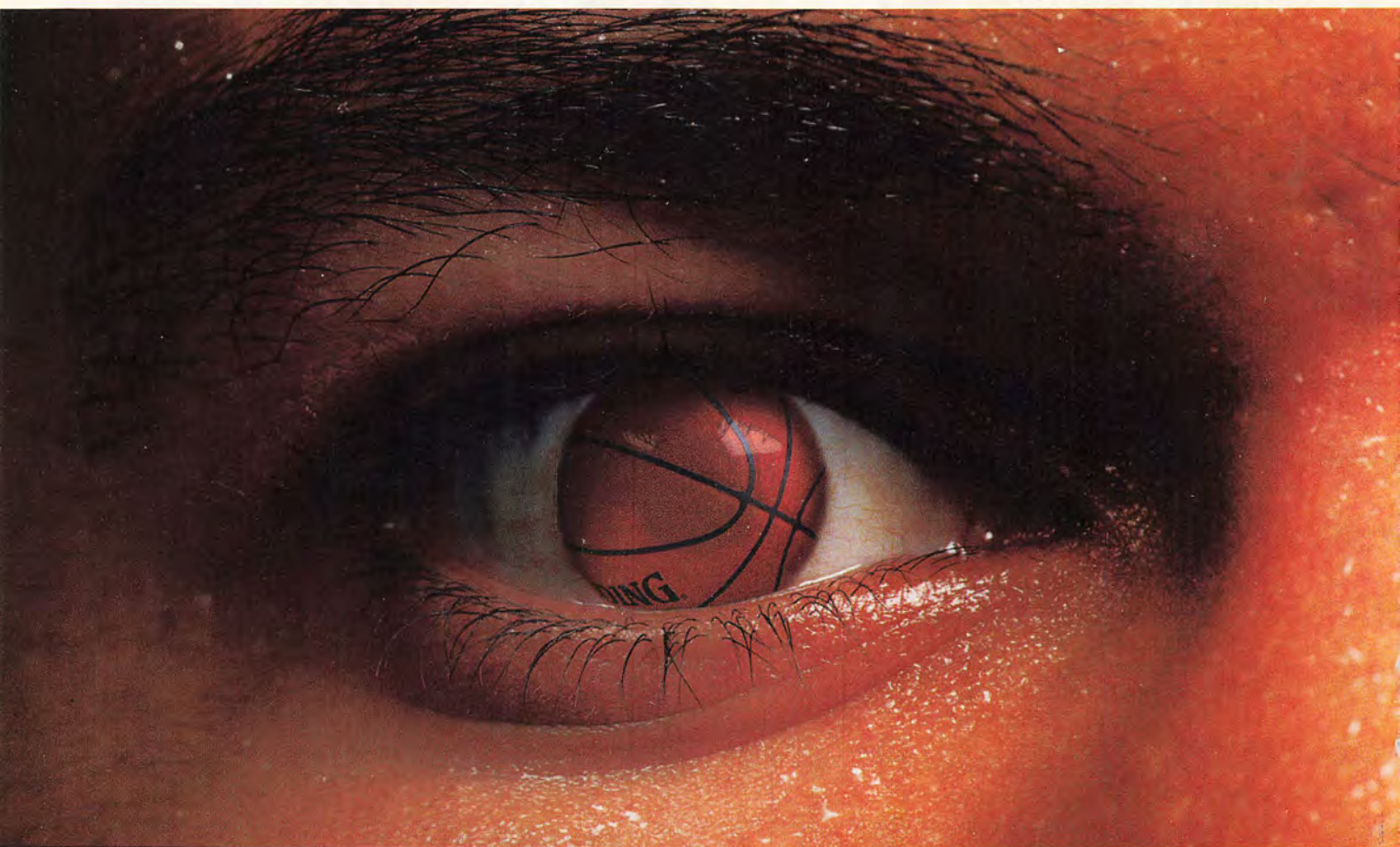
They had lost the exhibition to Ural Great-Russia, 102-98 in overtime. In the process, they had committed 33 turnovers and given up 40 points to 6-foot-5 Sergei Chikalin.

"We've got a big problem with our defense," said Florence, who was held out of the game for unspecified reasons and watched from the bench in street clothes. "You know, every year I've been here, our defense has always been ranked high. But right now, our defense isn't ready."

"We've just got to play good defense from the start."

Nebraska has played well defensively the past four seasons, producing four of the school's top five finishes in field goal percentage defense. Last season, opponents made only 41.6 percent of their field goal attempts and the season before, they made only 40 percent, a school record.

The Cornhuskers held 17 oppo-



Dec. 11 Pittsburgh 1:05 p.m.

nents to 60 or fewer points last season, and during the last two seasons, they have held 38 opponents to 66 or fewer points, winning 33 of those games.

Obviously, "you've got to defend," Florence said.

His presence on the court would have helped in the exhibition, as would the presence of Cookie Belcher, whose status for this season remains in doubt because of his right wrist.

Belcher is a two-time member of the Big 12 all-defensive team and holds Nebraska records for steals in a game, a season and a career. He is 57 steals from the NCAA career top 10.

Belcher didn't suit up for either of the Cornhuskers' exhibitions. A final determination on whether he plays or redshirts this season apparently won't be made until the end of December. He told the Omaha World-Herald that he would decide by the Minnesota game on Dec. 31.

If he's 100 percent, he will play, he said. But if he's anything less than 100

1999-2000 Nebraska Men's Roster

No.	Name	Pos	Cl.	Ht.	Hometown (HS/JC)
30	Cookie Belcher***	G	Sr.	6-4	Mexico, Mo.
21	Kenny Booker	F	Fr.	6-8	Clarksdale, Miss. (Mt. Zion Academy)
15	Steffon Bradford	F	Jr.	6-6	Clewiston, Fla. (Compton CC)
23	Ross Buckendahl*	F	Jr.	6-5	Battle Creek, Neb. (Northeast CC)
41	Ben Chesnut	F	Fr.	6-6	Crestwood, Ky. (South Oldham)
3	Cary Cochran*	G	So.	6-1	Minden, Iowa (Neola-Tri Center)
20	Brian Conklin	F/C	Fr.	6-11	Hubbard, Ohio
31	Kimani Ffriend	C	Jr.	6-11	Kingston, Jamaica (Gulf Coast CC)
11	Rodney Fields	G	Jr.	6-2	Tampa, Fla. (Tyler, Texas JC)
5	Larry Florence***	F	Sr.	6-5	Phenix City, Ala. (Central)
51	Louis Truscott*	F	So.	6-7	Houston, Texas (Milby)
0	Danny Walker	G	Jr.	6-1	Los Angeles, Calif. (Compton CC)
34	Craig Wortman*	G	Jr.	6-4	Hartington, Neb. (Northeast CC)

*-letters earned

percent by then, he will opt to take a redshirt to preserve his final season of collegiate eligibility.

Belcher has been able to participate in practices and would continue to do so if he were to redshirt. But the strength in his wrist and hand hadn't returned sufficiently for him to shoot.

"If he's going to play, he's going to have to be able to knock down the 12-to-15-footer," said Florence. "He's better than a lot of players at 78 percent. But still, teams are going to sag off of him, and they're not going to play him as tough as they would if he had his right hand.

"He knows we need him out there. But as far as his future, as far as him playing professionally, it would probably be best for him to sit out and get his hand 100 percent.

"Being greedy, I want him to come back. But I'm looking for his long haul, too."

Without Belcher, Florence would be the only returning starter and one of only three who played last

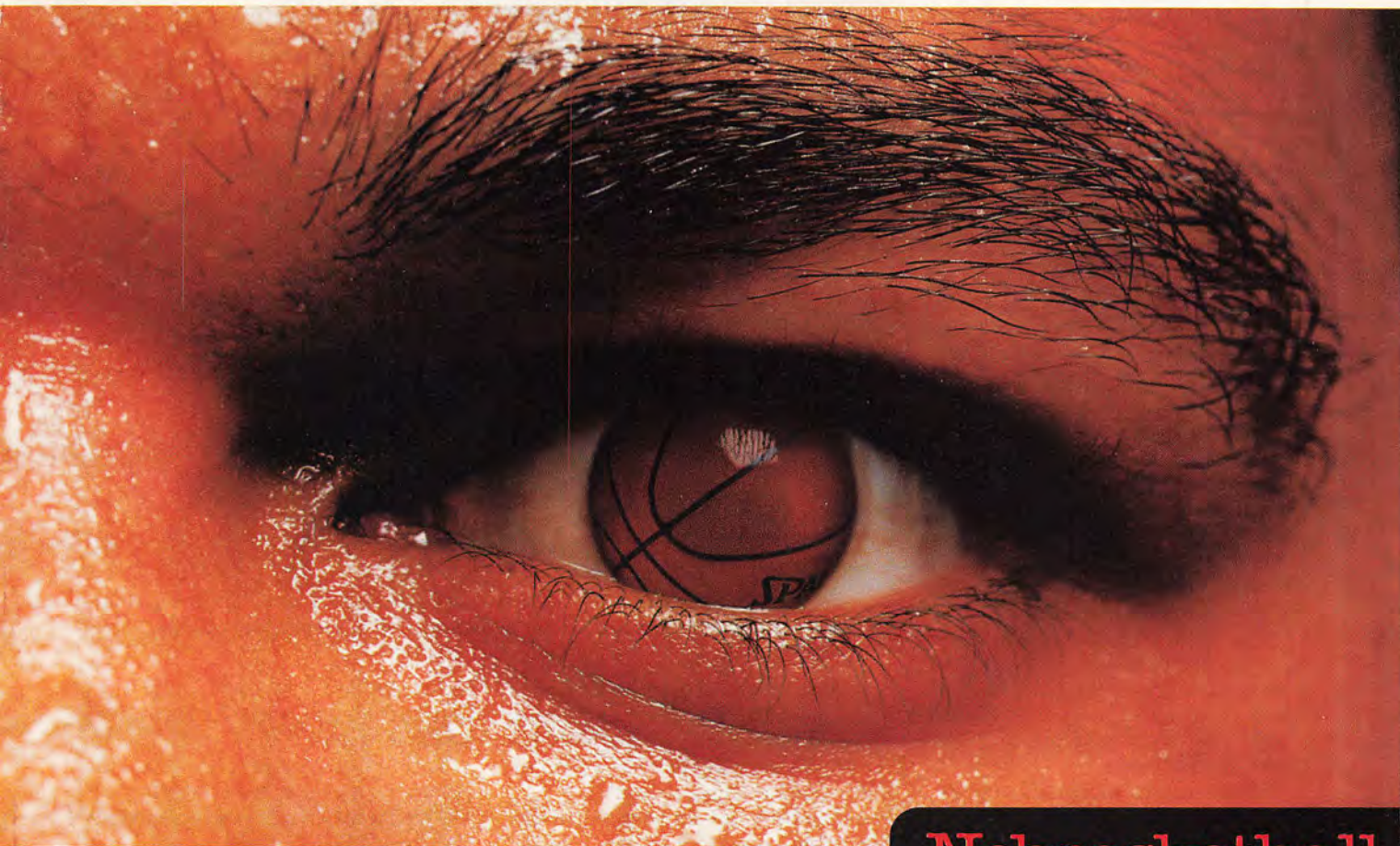
season — not counting walkon Ross Buckendahl, who has been put on scholarship.

Sophomores Cary Cochran and Louis Truscott are the other returnees.

That there are so many newcomers is among the reasons for the defensive inconsistency.

"There's a lot of help-side defense, and a couple of players, they're sticking to their man and not getting off the help-side," Florence said. "I would say (that's) because it's new.

"I think it will come in time. But right now, it's not there. They've just got to believe in it."



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Nee has restructured the offense, emphasizing a more up-tempo approach, and that has created some problems, not only for the newcomers but also for Florence, who was the team's third-leading scorer last season, averaging 10.1 points per game. "At first, I didn't really like it," he said.

"I was finding myself standing in the corner a lot and not doing the things I normally do. I like moving and cutting. But with practice, I'm getting a better feel for it.

"I think it's all right. But I feel we still have to have a few go-to plays because every team we play is not going to let us get up and down the court. So we're going to have to make some kind of adjustments. It suits our personnel. But we still have to have something to fall back on."

Athletically, Nebraska's personnel is as good as or better than it's ever been with the addition of junior college transfers Steffon Bradford, Kimani Ffriend, Danny Walker and Rodney Fields, who redshirted last season, as well as true freshman Kenny Booker.

Bradford and Ffriend put up impressive numbers in the exhibition games, rebounding and scoring, and Walker hit clutch 3-point shots to send both exhibitions into overtime.

The newcomers are feeling their way, adjusting to the major college level, and "we've been having a little trouble about guys getting down and feeling what we're doing . . . they can't see the meaning of it," said Florence. "But I think for the most part, it's a really strong team.

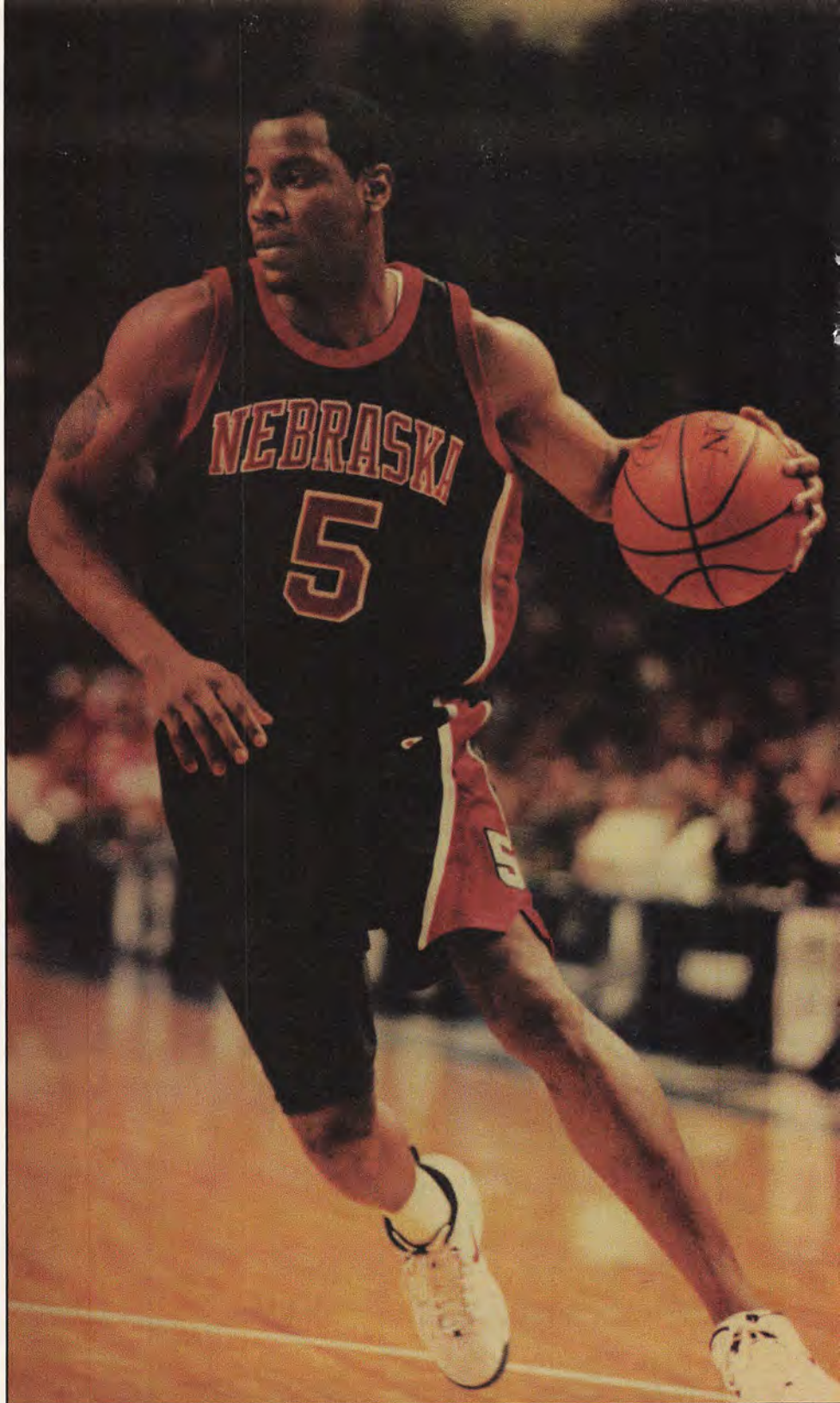
"You have to believe in Coach and believe in what we're trying to do. There are going to be times when they feel it's not working. But they're just going to have to continue to do it."

As one of only two seniors — Belcher is the other — Florence has found himself in a leadership position, a responsibility he readily accepts even though he's never been overly vocal.

"It's not really hard," he said. "It's just something I wasn't used to, being vocal.

"It's something I never had to do because in previous years, we had guys who were leading us, such as Andy Markowski, Tyronn (Lue), (Erick) Strickland, guys like that who didn't mind talking.

"I was the type of person who was just laid back. I tried to show by actions not (word of) mouth. But that's something I'll have to grow out of, and I think I've been doing a better job of it."



As one of only two seniors, Larry Florence finds himself in a leadership position.

Florence, who sat out his first season as a partial qualifier, was granted an additional season of eligibility by the NCAA after completing 75 percent of his graduation requirements.

His return has contributed to the optimism surrounding this season. But that optimism was tempered some by the exhibition games, particularly the second, which was the first

Nebraska had lost since 1988. The Cornhuskers had won 22 consecutive exhibition games.

Early in the season, Nebraska will be trying to develop team chemistry.

"We haven't really been able to get that down," Florence said.

That's understandable to some extent because "we have, basically, just a totally new team," he said. ■

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The Right Mix?

NU's Sanderford has 5 freshmen to stir things up, 5 seniors for stability

By Steven M. Sipple

The dichotomy is intriguing.

On one hand, there's the five first-year freshmen on the Nebraska women's basketball team's 1999-2000 roster. They're give-me-the-ball-and-get-out-of-my-way type of players. Type-A personalities. They stir things up.

On the other hand, you have the five Husker seniors. They're generally more even-keeled, Coach Paul Sanderford said. They're less likely to rock the boat.

The five freshmen — Amanda Buchholz, Stephanie Jones, Isha Kelley, Shahidrah Roberts and Paige Sutton — will contribute significantly this season, with Jones leading the way. The 6-foot-2 forward from Omaha, Neb., began her career with a 13-point, 10-rebound performance in Nebraska's 113-77 season-opening victory over Georgia Southern on Nov. 19 in Lincoln, Neb.

But freshmen typically don't lead basketball teams in crunch time, in March, when the stakes get bigger. Veterans are better wired for March pressure. Freshmen generally tag



Senior off-guard Brooke Schwartz scored a career-high 25 points in the loss to Wisconsin.

along, some more quickly and with more self-assurance than others.

Nebraska has played in two straight NCAA Tournaments. In 1998, when its current crop of seniors were sophomores, the Huskers advanced to the second round, losing to Old Dominion.

This season Nebraska wants more. The Huskers openly talk of their desire to reach the NCAA Sweet 16. And from there, who

knows?

Wherever the Huskers end up come March, it will be a group of five seniors — four of whom Sanderford didn't even recruit — who will lead them there.

"Coach (Angela) Beck left me a great group of kids," said Sanderford, in his third season at Nebraska after coaching 15 seasons at Western Kentucky. "They've been low-maintenance kids. They've been

kids who work tremendously hard. I've never had a great team that didn't have great senior leadership, and I think this team has the capability to have great senior leadership.

"Those seniors are going to determine whether we're successful or average."

Those seniors — Naciska Gilmore, Nicole Kubik, Charlie Rogers, Brooke Schwartz and Monique Whitfield (sidelined until December after offseason knee surgery) — met some early season adversity in the form of a 92-85 loss to Wisconsin on Nov. 21, only their third home setback in the Sanderford era. Kubik, a preseason All-Big 12 point guard, struggled mightily, shooting 4-for-17 from the floor and committing 10 turnovers, angering Sanderford.

"She was horrible," he growled.

It was an uncharacteristic performance from a player who often carried Nebraska down the stretch last season, when the Huskers finished

1999-2000 Nebraska Women's Roster

No.	Name	Pos	Cl.	Ht.	Hometown (HS/JC)
41	Candace Blackbird*	G/F	So	6-0	South Sioux City, Neb.
11	Amanda Buchholz	G	Fr.	5-7	Ogallala, Neb.
12	Amanda Cleveland	G	So.	6-2	Lancaster, Texas
34	Cisco Gilmore***	F/C	Sr.	6-0	Tulsa, Okla. (Will Rogers)
5	Jennifer Jaracz*	F	So.	6-0	Crestwood, Ky. (South Oldham)
25	Stephanie Jones	F	Fr.	6-2	Omaha, Neb. (Benson)
32	Nicole Kubik***	G	Jr.	5-10	Cambridge, Neb.
11	Isha Kelley	G	Fr.	5-9	Lincoln, Neb. (Southeast)
54	Casey Leonhardt	C	Jr.	6-5	Downers Grove, Ill. (North/Illinois)
14	Karsen Muller*	G	So.	5-6	Littleton, Colo. (Arapahoe)
4	Melody Peterson	G	Jr.	5-9	Pasadena, Calif. (Mater Dei/Stanford)
22	Margaret Richards	G	Fr.	5-9	Louisville, Ky. (Central)
24	Shahidrah Roberts	F	Fr.	5-9	Overland Park, Kan. (Blue Valley North)
33	Charlie Rogers***	C	Sr.	6-2	South Sioux City, Neb.
21	Brooke Schwartz***	G	Jr.	5-9	Gering, Neb.
30	Paige Sutton	F/C	Fr.	6-2	San Diego, Calif. (Bishop Gorman, Nev.)
20	Amanda Went**	G	Jr.	5-9	Columbus, Neb.
44	Monique Whitfield*	F	Sr.	6-1	L. Beach, Calif. (Lakewood/Cent. Ariz. CC)

21-12, including an NCAA first-round loss to Kentucky. The 5-10 Kubik, of Cambridge, Neb. (pop. 1,100), led the team last season in scoring (19.8) and assists (5.6), and her 136 steals led the nation and set a single-season school record.

This season defenses will likely make Kubik beat them from the outside after watching her frequently burn them off the dribble last season.

"She just needs to have fun and not put pressure on herself,"

Sanderford said. "If she stays healthy and relaxed, she has a chance to play at the next level."

Against Wisconsin — which returned five starters from its 1999 WNIT runner-up squad — Schwartz poured in a career-high 25 points. The 5-9 off-guard from Gering, Neb., is one of the most explosive players in the conference. Sanderford feels his senior backcourt tandem is the league's best.

But they combined for 16 of Nebraska's 32

turnovers against Wisconsin. The turnovers drive Sanderford nuts. But the Huskers' tough day against the Badgers was likely an aberration, albeit a costly one. The setback dropped then-No. 24 Nebraska out of the Associated Press Top 25. More importantly, such losses tend to haunt teams when the NCAA Tournament selection committee meets in March to determine its field.

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come in and play a defensive game like we did was really very encouraging," Wisconsin Coach Jane Albright said. "I think Nebraska is as good everybody said they are. I think they're a little better with the addition of the new people."

Jones, though, became less of a factor against Wisconsin, scoring two points and snaring five rebounds in 13 minutes. Her classmates — point guard Kelley, small forward Roberts and power forward Sutton 6 combined for three points in 12 minutes. Chalk the loss up to a learning experience for the rookies, the kind of lesson that will serve them well in the future.

The Nebraska veterans have been there, done that. Kubik has been a regular starter since her freshman season. Rogers has 59 career starts, Schwartz 43 and Gilmore 15. Whitfield, after transferring from Central Arizona Community College, started eight times last season.

The 6-2 Rogers, of South Sioux City, will benefit this season from the presence of 6-5 center Casey Leonhardt, who sat out last season after transferring from Illinois. Leonhardt allows Rogers to move to power forward, her more natural position.

Gilmore, of Tulsa, Okla, joins Schwartz and Kubik as co-captains. Sanderford wants Gilmore to emerge as Nebraska's defensive stopper.

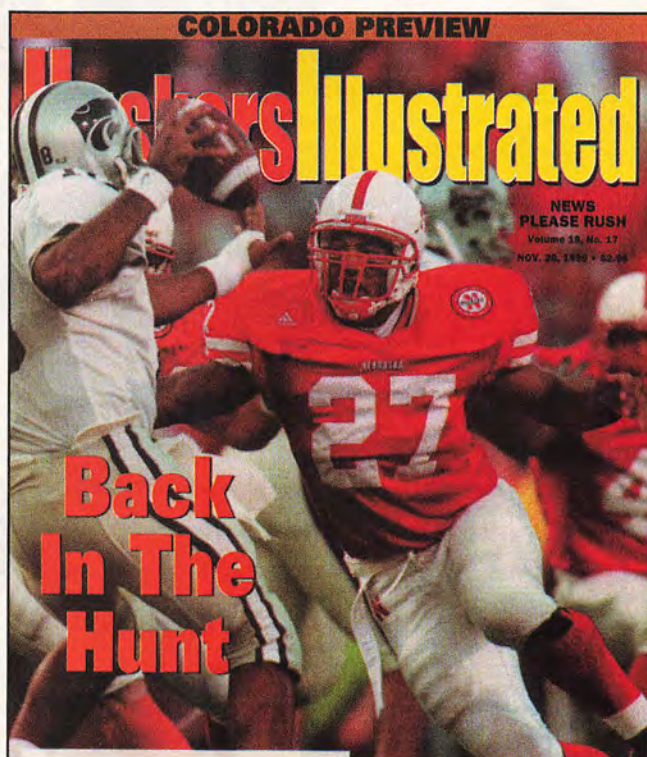
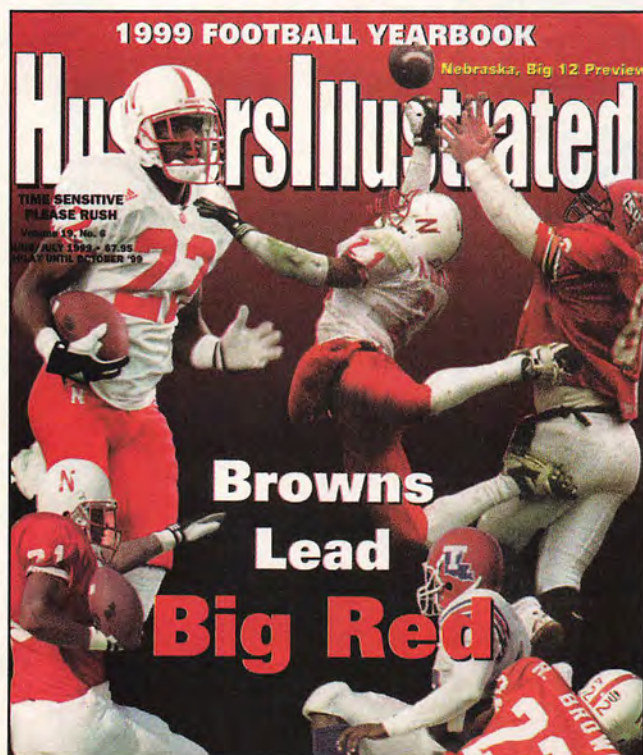
Whitfield suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in her right knee in July. If she can return in January, she would boost Nebraska's inside game for the stretch run.

Whether Nebraska is still a factor in the Big 12 and nationally in February and March will depend largely on how well the Huskers' new players blend with the veterans. Team chemistry is integral, and in NU's case, it might take some time to form. Wisconsin clearly had the edge in chemistry.

But the Huskers, picked to finish third in the Big 12 by league coaches, have too much experience and raw talent to be left home while other teams are gearing for the Big Dance in March. And Sanderford's seniors have too much pride to allow the program to take a step back.

"We want to leave our mark," Schwartz said. "We want to be the senior class that leads a group of excellent freshmen into the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament." ■

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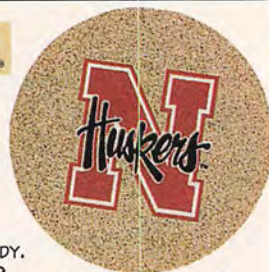
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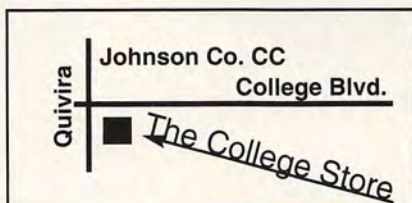


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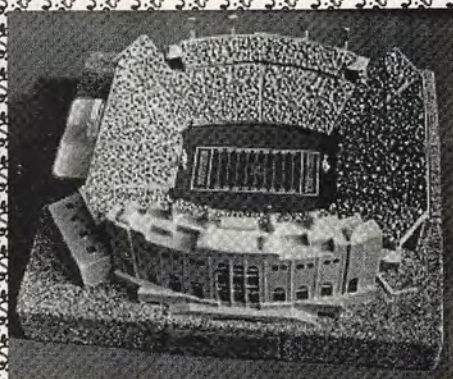
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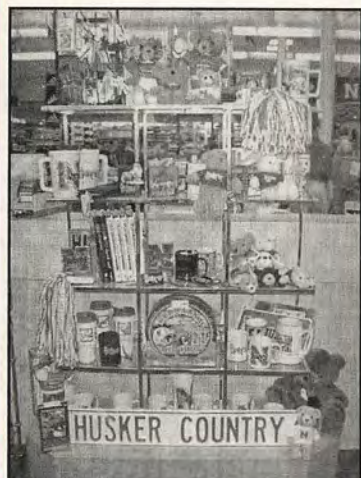
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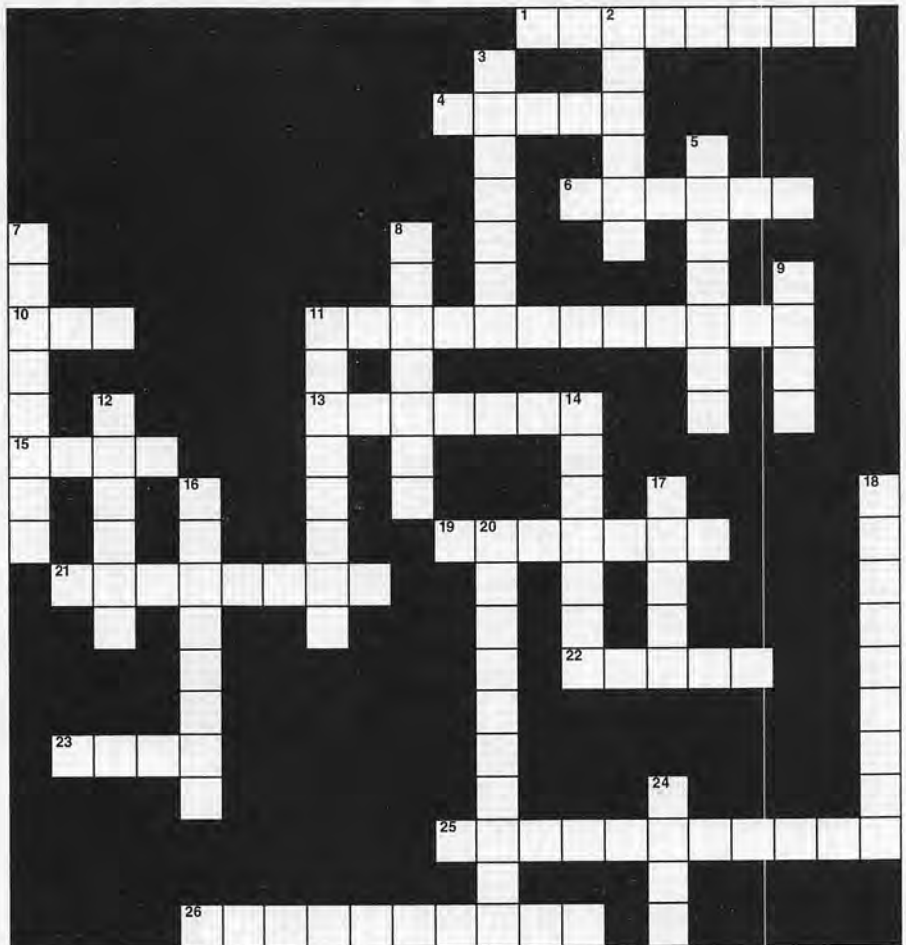
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4 NU's all-time leading scorer
6 NU's all-time leading rusher
10 Bowl pairings formula
11 Eric Crouch's high school
13 NU's first Heisman winner
15 Steeler guard from NU
19 Eric Johnson's hometown
21 NU coach before Devaney
22 NU's radio play-by-play announcer
23 NU linebacker coach
25 Bobby Newcombe's hometown
26 NU secondary coach

DOWN

- 2 NU's No. 1
3 NU's 1998 bowl opponent
5 1997 Lombardi Award winner
7 1971 national champion
8 NU's 1998 bowl
9 NU's No. 46
11 NU's career tackle leader
12 NU rush end coach
14 Chief guard from NU

CROSSWORD



- 16 Dominick Raiola's hometown
17 NU's radio color commentator
18 NU's 2000 road opener

- 20 NU's No. 17
24 NU's all-time leading passer
Answers in January issue

This Week in Husker History

November 28

1997 — Scott Frost rushes for 76 yards and passes for 92 yards to become one of a select few in NCAA Division IA history to rush and pass for 1,000 or more yards in the same season, and Ahman Green rushes for 202 yards and two touchdowns as the Cornhuskers complete an undefeated regular season with a 27-24 victory against stubborn Colorado at Boulder. The Buffaloes score twice in the final 3:16 to give Nebraska some anxious moments.

November 29

1991 — Calvin Jones runs 15 yards for a touchdown with 2:57 remaining to give No. 11-ranked Nebraska a 19-14 victory against No. 19 Oklahoma at Memorial Stadium. The Cornhuskers, who trail 14-3 at halftime, contribute to their own problems with three turnovers. Jones finishes with 118 yards rushing, and Derek Brown gains 98 yards. Quarterback Keithen McCant scores Nebraska's first touchdown, and Byron Bennett kicks field goals of 22 and 33 yards.

November 30

1922 — Chick Hartley scores Nebraska's

first touchdown and passes to Dave "Moose" Noble for the second as the Cornhuskers defeat Notre Dame 14-6 in the final game played at Nebraska Field. The contest attracts an overflow crowd, estimated at more than 15,000. Many others watch from outside, the fences. The only other blemish on Notre Dame's record is a tie with Army.

December 1

According to official records, Nebraska has never played a football game on this date.

December 2

1908 — Despite faculty protests over the scheduling of a post-season game, Nebraska plays the Carlisle Indians before a crowd estimated at 2,500 on a bitterly cold day in Lincoln. The Cornhuskers score first, but three minutes later, Jim Thorpe, the player everyone has come to watch, scores a touchdown on a 45-yard run, as Carlisle proves to be too much for Nebraska, winning 37-6.

December 3

1932 — Steve Hokuf catches a pair of

touchdown passes from George Sauer and teams with Bernie Masterson for another touchdown pass as Coach D.X. Bible's Big Six champion Cornhuskers defeat Southern Methodist 21-14 at the Texas State Fair stadium in Dallas. A crowd estimated at only 2,000 watches on a hot afternoon. Nebraska finishes with a 7-1-1 record. The loss is against Minnesota (7-6) and the tie is with Pittsburgh (0-0).

December 4

1971 — Coach Bob Devaney's concerns of a letdown following the "Game of the Century" against Oklahoma are quickly allayed as the top-ranked Cornhuskers complete a 12-0 regular season by defeating outmanned Hawaii 45-3 in Honolulu. Dave Mason scores the first touchdown, returning an interception 25 yards, less than two minutes after Rich Sanger kicks a 32-yard field goal. Jerry Tagge completes 12-of-25 passes for 248 yards and touchdowns to Jerry List, Johnny Rodgers and Frosty Anderson.

Note — Nebraska has played on this date only two other times. Both also are victories against Hawaii at Honolulu, in 1976 (68-3) and in 1982 (37-16). ■

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More Active Role

**Outside hitter
Oxley making a big
impact on offense
in junior season**

By Todd Henrichs

Growing up in western Nebraska, Angie Oxley remembers taking only a passing interest in the NU volleyball program.

That was until Oxley was introduced to perhaps the greatest player in Nebraska volleyball history.

Oxley's brother was a college classmate of Allison Weston in the year leading up to the Huskers' national championship in 1995. She said meeting Weston heightened her interest in the Huskers, who eventually lured Oxley from Ogallala to Lincoln in 1997.

"I remember at the time thinking it was pretty cool that my brother introduced me to her," said Oxley, now a junior at NU. "Before that, I'd come down for camps, but I always felt I was kind of sheltered in the west."

Oxley has been far from hidden since coming to Nebraska. She earned freshman-of-the-year hon-

ors in 1997 and started 25 matches for the NU team that reached the final four a year ago.

Defensively, she's among NU's leaders with 271 digs this season. That total already surpasses Oxley's marks in her first two years at Nebraska.

Offensively, Oxley, too, is making a big impact this season.

A versatile outside hitter, Oxley has put up solid numbers since being pulled from a redshirt season late in her freshman year. But as No. 12-ranked Nebraska climbed back atop the Big 12 Conference volleyball race this fall, Oxley mirrored the Huskers' rally with some improved play of her own.

The difference, Oxley says, is a change in attitude.

"Usually I've seen my role as keeping the ball in play and not making mistakes," Oxley said. "I've kind of just switched it to taking a few more risks and being more aggressive. I think it's paid off."

Oxley and fellow outside hitter Mandy Monson have helped to balance an offense that was at times too dependent on junior All-American Nancy Meendering.

After recording double-figure kills in four straight NU wins, Oxley ranked behind only Meendering among Huskers in kills per game. Entering the final week of the regular season, Oxley averaged 2.1 kills per game with a hitting percentage of nearly .215.

Oxley hit .216 last season, but was mired at .163 after NU's first 14 matches this season.

"They've put in a lot of extra work technically on attack," Nebraska's Terry Pettit said. "As coaches, we've made some adjustments. I think it's a combination of things that are paying off."

Along with Monson, Oxley also plays the critical role of primary passer for Nebraska. As NU's passing has improved, more options have opened up to setters Lindsay Wischmeier and Jill McWilliams.



Junior Angie Oxley (2), a versatile outside hitter, has put up solid numbers since being pulled from a redshirt season late in her freshman year. She is among Nebraska's defensive leaders this season.



Pettit doesn't hesitate to say how important his left-side players are.

"There's no question that if they play well, we're very difficult to beat," Pettit said. "That means we're passing, we're in system and we're going to block great.

"So to some degree, our team goes how our outsides play."

The turnaround, Oxley said, came following the Huskers' mid-season loss at Texas A&M. As a team, Nebraska has mirrored Oxley's surge by recovering from a 2-2 conference start to lead the league.

In pursuit of its 21st conference title in 25 seasons, Nebraska lost just once in its next 14 matches following the loss to Texas A&M. The Huskers avenged that defeat and an earlier setback to Kansas State.

"As we've gone back through teams that played us earlier, we've played better against every team the second time around," Pettit said. "That means that we're continuing to get better."

Even as NU was struggling, Pettit continually talked about his team playing its best ball come the final six matches of the regular season. Nebraska seemingly accomplished that and at the same time

likely secured home-court advantage for the first two rounds of the NCAA Tournament.

Oxley said the late-season surge has given Nebraska the confidence it will need to eventually go on the road in regional play and win its way back to the final four.

Pettit agreed.

"I believe the players sense that something special is happening and in some ways it's as much fun and as challenging to fight through that and come back as it is to just dominate everybody from the start," Pettit said. "This is not a conference that you can dominate. It's a conference that you have to go out and play well in every night."

But even when you're Nebraska, Oxley is evidence you can't succeed without taking some chances. After all, fewer and fewer observers gave NU a chance of winning the conference a month ago.

Just like Oxley once gave herself little chance of one day playing at Nebraska.

"We're closer together as a team than we have been all season," Pettit said. "It's the right time for that to happen." ■

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NU DBs Must Be Versatile

*Cornerbacks, safeties
asked to do more
in Husker defense*

By James Hale

In recent years, the Nebraska secondary has gone through a transformation.

It goes with the transformation of the total defense in the 1990s, but it's a change nonetheless.

Nebraska has always had great athletes in the secondary who have been able to cover. The Cornhuskers are one

of the great pressure defenses in college football, but to play that defense, the secondary is asked to do more than in past years.

More often than not, the Huskers' defensive backs are asked to handle man coverage, and that isn't just assigned to the cornerbacks. Husker safeties are asked to do that as well. However, the rover and free safety

may be asked to do even more than cornerbacks.

Stopping the run is the priority in Nebraska's defensive scheme, and to really accomplish that, the back end of the Nebraska defense must be active in run defense. Mike Brown, Joe Walker and Clint Finley bring a physical presence with them to each and every game. Opposing teams know they will

Nebraska Commitments for 2000

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Jake Andersen	Denver (Mullen)	6-2	305	OL
Thunder Collins	Los Angeles (East L.A. College)	6-2	210	IB
Ira Cooper	Omaha (Westside), Neb.	6-1 1/2	220	LB
Sandro DeAngelis	Buffalo, N.Y. (St. Joseph Coll.)	5-9	195	FB/K
Mike Erickson	Papillion (Papillion-LaVista), Neb.	6-4	260	OL
Martin Flaum	Denver (Northglenn), Colo.	6-5	280	OL
Steve Kriewald	North Loup-Scotia	5-11	250	FB
DeWayne Long Jr.	West Des Moines (Dowling) Iowa	6-1	205	RB
Lornell McPherson	Omaha (Central), Neb.	5-11	175	DB/WB
Ross Pilkington	Loveland, Colo.	6-1	175	WR
Nick Povendo	Keller, Texas	6-5	285	OG
Jason Richenberger	Liberty, Mo.	6-3	210	LB
Chris Septak	Millard (West), Neb.	6-4	235	TE
Ben Zajicek	Beatrice, Neb.	6-0	200	WR/DB

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Finding physical safety types is always a priority with the Nebraska coaching staff. In fact, Nebraska normally tries to sign an extra safety or two because many times they are eventually converted to linebackers. Nebraska looks to put its best athletes at safety and linebacker, so it all makes sense, and every year, it's important they sign at least two or three. However, it's even more so this season, with so many upperclassmen playing key roles in the Husker defensive system.

Jevan Witherspoon (6-foot-4, 200 pounds with 4.48 speed in the 40-yard dash) of Wayne (Bishop-Luers), Ind., may turn out to be a great wide receiver in college, but he is a dynamite free safety prospect as well. This is the second straight year that Witherspoon has posted big numbers. He has caught 55 passes for 946 yards and 12 touchdowns and made 61 tackles on defense and come up with seven interceptions.

You get the feeling Witherspoon will wind up on offense in college, but he admits that he loves playing the defensive side as well.

"I would say that more schools are recruiting me as a wide receiver, but I think Nebraska is recruiting me as an athlete and will let me see where I fit in best," Witherspoon said. "I have never been to Nebraska but know they are a great program. I want to see the game day atmosphere that I have heard so much about. I can't wait to see Lincoln be transformed into the third largest city in the state on game day. Nebraska is always playing for a national championship, and I can't wait to see the program first hand."

Witherspoon visited Purdue and was scheduled to visit Nebraska, Notre Dame, Michigan State and Northwestern.

Dominique Sims (6-2, 195, 4.5) of Minneapolis (DeLaSalle), Minn., plays on both sides of the ball as a quarterback/free safety prospect. Nebraska likes him more as a free safety, and Sims has put together an excellent season with 67 tackles, 17 pass knock downs, one interception, one fumble recovery and one forced fumble. He's having a banner season on offense as well, rushing for 15 scores, throwing for 11 more, returning one kickoff 97 yards for the distance and taking two punt returns back for touchdowns of 55 and 61 yards.

Sims has set visits with Colorado, Minnesota and Northwestern and is working on one with Nebraska.

Recruiting Notes

NU Gets Commitment; Lineman Changes Mind

Nebraska picked up one commitment and lost one player who had previously committed just before presstime.

Ben Zajicek, who played running back and defensive back at Beatrice (Neb.) High School, told Husker coaches he would accept a scholarship offer. He expects to play receiver and defensive back in college.

Zajicek rushed 81 times for 571 yards and nine touchdowns in six games for the Orangemen. He missed three games his senior season because of a shoulder injury. Zajicek is a sprinter for the Beatrice track team, with bests 10.8 seconds in the 100 meters and 22.0 in the 200.

Meanwhile, offensive lineman Josh Plisch of Rothschild, Wis., has backed out of his early commitment to NU. He apparently changed his mind because he wanted to play closer to home and has recently committed to Minnesota.

Nebraska is losing out on the top players in the country. Linebacker Dee Jay Williams (6-1, 225, 4.5) of Concord DeLaSalle, Calif., has set three visits and has narrowed his list for the other two. Williams may be leaning toward Texas and has a visit set with the Longhorns. He also has visits set with Michigan and Florida State. California, Miami, Tennessee and Penn State have made the cut for his final two.

It's amazing that Penn State can still recruit anybody, considering it already has 26 commitments. But, when it's the No. 1 player in the country, exceptions can be made, and changes would be in order. California remains a solid contender, since it's close to both his mother and father, which is important to Williams. He said it was a tough decision to lock the Huskers out.

"Nebraska is a great football program, but I can't visit everywhere," Williams said. "Every school that is recruiting me is a quality football team and a great academic institution. I really can't pinpoint any particular reason why I won't visit Nebraska, except to say maybe I just liked some other programs better for my situation."

The Huskers have also lost out on running back Chris Howard (5-11, 180, 4.4) of Wilmington (Banning), Calif., who committed to USC. The worst kept secret in prep football recruiting was Howard's love for the Trojans.

The Huskers are still very much in the hunt for All-America running back Tatum Bell (5-11, 190, 4.45) of DeSoto, Texas. Bell lists Oklahoma, Nebraska, Colorado, Syracuse, Kansas State and Texas as his favorite schools.

Another talented Texas running back, Tyson Thompson (6-2, 190, 4.4) of Irving (Nimitz), has narrowed his choices to TCU and Texas. The Longhorns are once again on pace to sign the top class in the Big 12 and quite possibly in the country. It's interesting that high profile running backs are still interested in the Longhorns because their first commitment back in the summer came from All-American Sneezy Beltran (5-10, 200, 4.45) of Abilene, Texas.

There are rumblings that All-America quarterback Chance Mock (6-1, 190, 4.5) of The Woodlands, Texas, is rethinking his decision to go to Texas. If Mock did change his mind, that could benefit Texas A&M, his second choice. At Texas, last year's No. 1 prep signal caller Chris Simms is waiting in the wings, and Major Applewhite could be a major player for the Heisman Trophy next year as a junior. Texas A&M does not have a sure-fire replacement for senior Randy McCown next year. ■

"Nebraska is a great team with a great tradition," Sims said. "You really can't find anything wrong with the program at all. They have a solid coaching staff, and it is one of the best places to play in college football."

Adrian Mayes (6-2, 190, 4.5) of Houston (Forest Brook) is a preseason All-American rated as one of the very

best in the country. A track (300-meter hurdle champ) and football athlete, Mayes is just what every team in the country is looking for in a safety. He has the size, speed and agility that everybody wants.

Mayes played on both sides of the ball as a tailback/free safety, but a blood clot in his leg required surgery,

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and he has missed half of the season. He has been in rehabilitation for the past month and says the leg is already back to 89 percent. He will be healthy enough to defend his track crown but won't play football again until two a-days in the summer.

Nebraska and UCLA are his top two teams right now, with Michigan, Tennessee, Miami, Oklahoma and Texas A&M also in the picture.

"I very much hope to go to Nebraska and play for them," Mayes said. "My high school team runs the same defense they do, and I would like to keep running that. They have a great program and are right at the top of my list."

Reggie Harrell (6-4, 200, 4.4) of Arlington (Lamar), Texas, is another top prospect. Harrell plays on both sides of the ball, catching 20 passes for 500 yards and two touchdowns, while also making 50 tackles and three interceptions. Harrell hasn't set any visits yet because he wasn't scheduled to take the ACT until mid-November. However, Texas, Kansas State, Colorado, Texas A&M, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Nebraska are schools he is considering visiting.

"Nebraska always plays hard, and Joe Walker used to go to Lamar," Harrell said. "They always play hard on both sides of the ball, and they bring that intensity to the game that everybody is looking for. You have to appreciate how they play the game."

Keith Lander (6-2, 175, 4.4) of Denver (Manuel), Colo., is a wide receiver/free safety and an outstanding athlete. Lander has three interceptions despite the fact teams try to avoid him as much as possible, and he has four touchdown passes coming out of the slot.

Lander is working to set visits with Iowa, Oregon, Nebraska, Kansas, Kansas State and Wyoming.

"I really like Nebraska's defense and how they go about their business," Lander said. "They are always one of the best defensive teams in the country, and I would like to be a part of that."

O.J. Owens (6-1, 195, 4.3) of New London (Stanley), N.C., has blazing speed and is outstanding in centerfield on defense. Owens has set one visit to North Carolina but says he is also working on visits with Nebraska, Florida State, Florida and Michigan.

Larry Stevens (6-4, 215, 4.55) of Tacoma (Wilson), Wis., is one of the top free safety prospects in the West. He is talking to Michigan, Nebraska, Colorado, Washington, Washington State, Oregon and UCLA. ■

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Just Winning Isn't Enough

Players say overtime victory most likely knocks them out of national championship game



Mike BABCOCK

UNDER SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT circumstances, Nebraska would have seemed a team of destiny.

Winning a national championship requires a bit of luck, and the Cornhuskers certainly needed that to escape scenic Folsom Field with a 33-30 overtime victory against Colorado.

The finish was reminiscent of Nebraska's overtime victory at Missouri in 1997.

That game, like this one, turned on the final play in regulation, Matt Davison's touchdown catch in 1997 and Jeremy Aldrich's missed 34-yard field goal attempt on the Friday after Thanksgiving.

Both plays were so extraordinary as to be unbelievable.

The effects of the plays are likely to be different, however. While Davison's catch kept the Cornhuskers' national title hopes alive, Aldrich's miss might have done the opposite.

Had Aldrich been successful, of course, Nebraska would have had no chance of passing Virginia Tech in the Bowl Championship Series rankings and earning a Sugar Bowl bid opposite Florida State.

But even the miss might have dashed the Cornhuskers' national championship hopes, because the consensus of opinion is, they shouldn't have needed such an unlikely play to win at Colorado.

And in the wonderful world of the BCS, perception can be as important as reality.

That's why Nebraska came away from its 10th victory of the season uncertain whether to laugh in relief or cry in the belief that it would fall further behind Virginia Tech in the BCS rankings.

More Cornhuskers than not seemed to expect the latter. "There is no talk about the national championship," said rover Mike Brown. "It's all about the Big 12 (championship)."

"We just have to focus on the Big 12 now," cornerback Ralph Brown said.

What was it about a victory that would elicit such a response?

"The score of the game, the second-half play, it didn't look too impressive," said Ralph Brown.

Despite the 24-40 loss at Texas on Oct. 23, Nebraska had been closing the gap on undefeated Virginia Tech, enough so that the week before the Colorado game, the BCS rankings were adjusted slightly to improve Virginia Tech's chances of remaining ahead of the Cornhuskers.

The adjustment involved disregarding post-season games played by James Madison, an NCAA Division I-AA team Virginia Tech defeated, in determining the Hokies' strength of schedule.

Apparently, Division I-AA opponents pose a problem

for the BCS.

BCS coordinator Roy Kramer claimed the change wasn't really a change just a clarification. His claim seemed transparent given the timing. But the BCS was in danger of a meltdown, with three qualified teams for the two Sugar Bowl spots. And something had to be done, however minor.

Despite that change, and even though the victory at Colorado depended on luck, Nebraska still has an outside chance of slipping past Virginia Tech for the second Sugar Bowl bid.

Florida State wrapped up the first by defeating archrival Florida to finish undefeated.

The Seminoles are No. 1 by a considerable margin in the BCS rankings, an indication not only of their strength but also of the limitations of the system. Take away tradition and there isn't a whole lot of difference between what Florida State and Virginia Tech have done this season.

That works to Nebraska's advantage, however, because the Cornhuskers still have a shot with one loss. An impressive victory against Texas in the Big 12 championship game, however "impressive" is defined in the complicated BCS formula, might still get Nebraska to New Orleans.

It's a longshot, to be sure. But never say never.

Those who watched the Colorado game should understand that.

"During the game, we're not even thinking about the national championship," Cornhusker quarterback Eric Crouch said. "Now we've got another game."

"Those things are under your control."

And the BCS rankings are not.

Nebraska gave up control of its own destiny when it lost at Texas. If it were still undefeated, it would be able to wrap up a trip to New Orleans with a victory in the Big 12 championship game.

Now, "whatever happens, happens," I-back Dan Alexander said.

"Whatever happens with the BCS, so be it," said strong-side linebacker Tony Ortiz. "We're not focused on that right now. We're just focused on the Big 12 championship game."

Even if Nebraska doesn't play for the national championship in the Sugar Bowl, it could finish with a 12-1 record, a Big 12 championship and a victory in the Fiesta Bowl.

There was a time when that would have been considered an exceptional season.

And the victory at Colorado would have made the Cornhuskers a team of destiny.

Because of the BCS rankings, however, the victory seems more like a blemish. ■



Mike Brown says the conference title is where it's at.

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 20 years. Mike can be reached at mdb@jnetnebr.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.

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